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The Piano Improvisations of Chick Corea: An Analytical Study.

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THE PIANO IMPROVISATIONS
OF CHICK COREA:
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

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B.M., Northwestern University, 1984

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PREFACE

This monograph is an analysis of the first five pieces from an album by Chick Corea, *Piano Improvisations, Volume One*. The titles of the individual pieces are *Noon Song*, *Song for Sally*, *Ballad for Anna*, *Song of the Wind*, and *Sometime Ago*. These pieces, which form a suite of sorts, were chosen for a variety of reasons. High quality transcriptions are available, the pieces have never been dealt with in detail, and they embody an intriguing mixture of classical styles, jazz styles, improvisation, and composition.

Chapter one furnishes background information on Corea and general observations on the *Piano Improvisations*. Chapter two discusses existing analytical studies of jazz and describes the methods used in this study. Chapters three through seven comprise the detailed analyses of the pieces, followed by conclusions in chapter eight.

I decided to use the term "classical" to describe what is generally regarded as western European art music. In the context of this paper, this term refers to music of approximately the 17th through 19th centuries. In referring to works by composers such as Berg, Hindemith, Messiaen, and Cage, I use the term "20th-century classical music." I also use the term "jazz" in a general way, inclusive of various styles within jazz. There are two main reasons for this use of the terminology: when style comparisons

are made in this study, the focus tends to be on jazz and classical styles as a whole, rather than finer gradations such as bebop, cool jazz, baroque, etc. Furthermore, these are the most commonly used terms, for which no widely accepted substitutes exist.

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ABSTRACT

Though the number of theoretical studies of jazz has increased in recent years, detailed analysis has been applied to only a small fraction of the body of jazz music. Chick Corea's *Piano Improvisations* are of particular interest: high quality transcriptions are available, the pieces have never been dealt with in detail, and they embody an intriguing mixture of classical and jazz styles.

Analysis of Corea's *Piano Improvisations* raises issues as to what methods are appropriate in the analysis of jazz. There are currently two, somewhat conflicting, schools of thought. Some believe that analytical techniques traditionally applied to classical music (e.g. motivic and Schenkerian) are inappropriate for use in jazz analysis because the types of relationships sought by these methods are too complex to be created in improvised music. Formulaic analysis is proposed as an approach that takes the improvisation process into account.

Others view improvisation as more closely related to composition. Schenkerian theories have been applied to jazz improvisation, giving evidence that the music can contain the same sorts of relationships expected of classical composition.

Without denying the value of formulaic analysis, the present study leans in the other direction, focusing on

the music as an end product, rather than the process by which it was created. The present study applies traditional formal, harmonic, and motivic analysis to five of Corea's *Piano Improvisations*, along with reductive techniques related to Schenkerian analysis. The five pieces analyzed are *Noon Song*, *Song for Sally*, *Ballad for Anna*, *Song of the Wind*, and *Sometime Ago*.

The analytical techniques used prove to be an effective means of considering these pieces. Much is revealed about the nature of the *Piano Improvisations* including harmonic language that combines elements of jazz and classical music, coherent forms generated largely by variation, and a wide variety of melodic invention based on economical motivic materials. Analysis of the *Piano Improvisations* points to common elements shared between classical music and jazz, and between composition and improvisation.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Chick Corea: Life and Works

Armando Anthony "Chick" Corea was born June 12, 1941 in Chelsea, Massachusetts. He became interested in music at an early age, beginning piano study at the age of four. His first training came through his father Armando, a jazz trumpeter and bandleader in the Boston area. At age seven Corea began lessons with Salvatore Sullo, a concert pianist in the Boston area. With Sullo, Corea studied traditional piano technique and repertoire, including Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin.¹ Corea was also exposed to jazz from early on. His influences include Bud Powell, Joe Henderson, McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, and Bill Evans.² He was particularly interested in the music of Horace Silver, transcribing many of Silver's tunes and solos.³ After graduating from high school, Corea attended the Juilliard School of Music for a short time before leaving to pursue jazz as a full-time career.⁴

Some of Corea's first significant professional engagements were with the Latin bands of Willie Bobo and Mongo Santamaria, and Corea has retained a strong affinity for Latin music throughout his career. Other musicians with whom Corea worked early in his career (ca. 1964-67) include trumpeter Blue Mitchell and saxophonist Stan Getz.⁵

Corea joined Miles Davis's band in 1968, replacing Herbie Hancock as the keyboardist. This was a major event in Corea's career, giving an international reputation.⁶ At that time Miles Davis and his band played a form of free jazz that involved group improvisation, polytonality, and use of electronic instruments.

After playing with Davis for three years, Corea left to pursue his own nonelectronic approach to free jazz, forming a band called Circle in the early seventies. According to Ian Carr, Circle "went even more deeply into the European vein of abstraction. It created an acoustic music which often had no relation to Afro-American forms such as the blues or gospels, no coherent physical rhythmic grooves, but which featured much scurrying and chittering non-tonal improvisation."⁷ According to Corea, Circle was based on communication, both between players and with the audience. The group engaged in free improvisation with few limits and no pre-planning. Eventually the music seemed to be unrelated to anything, particularly the audience. Reflecting on his decision to leave, Corea said, "When I see an artist using his energies and technique to create a music way beyond the ability of people to connect with it, I see his abilities being wasted."⁸ Corea's departure from Circle coincided with his discovery of Scientology and the writings of L. Ron Hubbard. Corea was particularly interested in

Hubbard's ideas on communication.⁹ Regarding communication with the listener, Corea said, "My own particular code as a performer is this: it's up to me to do something for an audience."¹⁰

In musical terms, Corea's desire for greater communication with the audience led to a more accessible, lyrical style. A direct result of this was the recording of two volumes of *Piano Improvisations* in 1971.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, Corea formed a band called Return to Forever, which existed with various personnel throughout most of the seventies. Return to Forever tended toward electric jazz rock or fusion, often combined with a Latin style. Corea also continued to play more traditional jazz on occasion.

Return to Forever broke up in 1980. Since then, Corea has been involved in a wide variety of musical pursuits, including solo performances, duos, and ensembles. Musicians with whom he has collaborated include pianists Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, and Friedrich Gulda and vibraphonist Gary Burton. He has also recorded Mozart's *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* and composed his own three movement piano concerto.¹²

The most noticeable quality in Corea's output is the wide variety of musical styles in which he has operated. It is noteworthy that this versatility has not come at the expense of quality.¹³ Ian Carr sums up the consensus of

many writers: "Corea ranks with Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett as one of the leading keyboard virtuosi and composer-bandleaders since the late 1960s. He is one of the most original and gifted composers in jazz."¹⁴ In addition to the general admiration for Corea's work, the *Piano Improvisations* in particular were given a glowing review in *Down Beat* magazine. The review begins discussing Corea's ensemble playing and then moves to the *Piano Improvisations*:

Chick is an original and a giant. His playing is total; his harmonic thinking, melodies and rhythmic phrasing are so interwoven that everything he plays is complete.

That may be the reason why he has at long last recorded a solo album, *Piano Improvisations Volume One*, which happily implies that there will be a volume two. His work there is truly beyond words. This is one of the most important piano albums I have heard.¹⁵

The review goes on to praise Corea's use of a variety of styles.

The variety of styles in Corea's output is not surprising, given the diversity of his training and influences. Corea describes his earliest musical training with his father, where he learned "how to read and write music, which was all very important groundwork. He'd [i.e. Corea's father] often write out arrangements of popular tunes that he played with his own band, but he'd write them for my level, so I learned notation in a very meaningful way."¹⁶ In addition to jazz and Latin music,

Corea was also influenced by a wide variety of classical music. Asked about his repertoire for piano practice, Corea replied, "Alban Berg's *Piano Sonata* is one of my favorite piano works. I'll play anything by Bach, some of Chopin's etudes, Mozart sonatas, or Messiaen's piano music."¹⁷ Corea's more experimental music with Miles Davis's band and Circle reflects the influence of other practitioners of free jazz, such as Ornette Coleman, and also the influence of avant-garde composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage.¹⁸ Corea's use of quartal harmonies could be linked to sources as diverse as Alban Berg, McCoy Tyner, Horace Silver, and Paul Hindemith.¹⁹

The eclectic nature of Corea's style and output is reflected in his opinions on musical style. For Corea, barriers between styles are based not on genuine musical differences so much as they are on artificial social constructs. When asked whether certain fully notated music qualified as jazz, Corea replied, "You have one aspect of this backward, to my way of thinking. The user is the one who creates the style. I don't ask myself, 'does this work as jazz?' I'll create the music I need without thinking about style."²⁰ Corea is even more emphatic in a later interview: "I'm trying to break down the barriers, actually, between jazz music and classical music. There's such a rich tradition and a rich esthetic in both areas that I love to operate in. I see no barrier

myself...."²¹ Certainly the *Piano Improvisations* are as much a manifestation of this philosophy as any of Corea's works.

Piano Improvisations: General Comments

While the *Piano Improvisations* embody a wide variety of styles, there are certain aspects that they all share. In the most basic sense, they all have the same texture: melody and accompaniment. Within that framework there is considerable variety. One of the most striking features of the *Piano Improvisations* is the degree to which they make use of both classical and jazz styles. Though the line between jazz and classical styles is sometimes indistinct, many elements in the *Piano Improvisations* can be traced to one tradition or the other.

Jazz Influences

There are many characteristics of jazz that occur frequently in the *Piano Improvisations*. The harmonies in jazz are extended or altered the majority of the time. It is very rare to have triads with no added tones. As a result, the extended tones are often omitted in the labeling. For example, a chord labeled as "ii" can be assumed to contain a 7th and possibly a 9th without actually labeling the chord as "ii7/9." The present study follows this convention, in that not every extended note is labeled. An attempt is made to provide as much detail as is necessary to understand the subject at hand.

The voicings reflect the importance of the extended chord tones. The 7th, 9th, and 6th (or 13th) are prominent, while the 5th (unless it is altered) and even the root are often omitted. For example, the following would be a common jazz voicing of a C major chord:



This sonority could also be interpreted as a quartal harmony based on E. The context can clarify the role of a harmony; for example, the chord above might be preceded by a clear dominant harmony on G. There are cases in the *Piano Improvisations* in which there is no clear context, leading to a certain amount of ambiguity.

The practice of omitting the root is probably derived from playing in ensembles with a string bass. The piano often leaves out the root to avoid clashing with the line created by the bass player. In solo playing, rootless voicing may also be used for pragmatic reasons: it can be difficult to play a bass line, complex harmonies, and a melody simultaneously.

Rootless voicing of dominant 7th type harmonies leads to a peculiar ambiguity known in jazz as tritone substitution. Two of the main two notes of a dominant 7th chord, the 3rd and the 7th, are a tritone apart. Since the tritone does not change when inverted, it is

impossible to tell which is the 3rd and which is the 7th in a rootless voicing. This implies two possible roots, a tritone apart: a rootless dominant 7th chord on V could just as easily be interpreted as a dominant 7th chord built on flat II. The example below shows two different possibilities for the same pitches and their resolutions. The unplayed root is shown in parentheses:



Even the additional extensions of the chord can fit into either interpretation. For example, A-sharp (the raised 9th of the G7 chord) becomes B-flat (the added sixth of the D-flat7 chord). The actual root of the chord cannot be determined and is, in fact, immaterial, since the resolution and voice-leading are identical in both cases.

In traditional jazz, as in classical music, there is a tendency toward root movement down a 5th or up a 4th. The most definitive chord progression in jazz is ii - V - I, very similar to IV - V - I in classical music.

The rhythm in jazz tends to be more complex than is the norm in common practice classical music. Syncopation is used quite frequently. There is also a common

occurrence known as "swing rhythm" or "swinging eighth notes." When this occurs, the rhythm as notated below:



would be performed in approximately the following manner:



This is somewhat similar to the use of "notes inégales" in French baroque music. The *Piano Improvisations* make some use of swing rhythm, but not to a great extent.

Another convention of jazz, found somewhat more frequently in the *Piano Improvisations*, is Latin rhythm or bossa nova. Latin rhythm uses straight, rather than swung eighth notes. In this convention the left hand establishes a groove or beat, possibly involving syncopation but still with a perfectly steady pulse. The right hand plays off the relative steadiness of the left hand, playing lines that are more syncopated. This often involves the superimposing of ternary figures on a duple meter, as demonstrated by Barry Kernfeld in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*:²²



This blend of jazz and samba originated in Brazil and became popular in the USA in the 1960's.²³

Classical Influences

Classical conventions are also an important influence in the *Piano Improvisations*. One of the most obvious manifestations of this is the approach to form. The typical jazz tune form of two verses, a bridge, and a repeat of the verse (AABA) is noticeably absent in the *Piano Improvisations*. The structures used are similar to traditional classical forms. Corea often uses forms that are conducive to improvisation such as rondo form or variations on a repeated harmonic progression.

Some of the more complex harmonies, including altered chords, highly extended chords, polychords, and quartal harmonies, have their origins in late 19th- or 20th-century classical music. This is also true of the use of a wide variety of scales and modes. Many of these traits began to be integrated into jazz before the *Piano Improvisations*. As a result, it is not always possible to determine whether these influences derive from 20th-century classical music or from jazz that had already incorporated these elements. In Corea's case there are indications, such as his familiarity with works of Berg and Messiaen, that he might have encountered this harmonic language in both idioms.²⁴

Piano Improvisations: Individual Pieces

Noon Song

The tonic of *Noon Song* is D major with some emphasis on F major as well. For the most part, the piece remains within the realm of traditional functional harmony. The form is driven by a series of variations on a repeated harmonic progression. This sectional form is cast in a large two-part structure. The texture is reminiscent of a Chopin Nocturne, in that the left hand plays an arpeggiated accompaniment with lots of pedal, while the right hand plays a florid melody. There are motives that appear throughout the piece, but there is little in the way of consistent "themes" or melodies. Throughout most of the piece there is no meter or sense of pulse, somewhat like the unmeasured preludes of the French clavecinists. There are what sound like downbeats, usually the low notes in the left hand, but in between there is no consistent beat. The eighth notes are straight rather than in swing rhythm; the tempo is medium slow. There are some areas of the piece that depart from the general tendencies; these sections have more of a sense of meter, a faster tempo, and a different texture.

Song for Sally

Song for Sally is in the key of A minor, from which it never strays. Most of the harmonies are traditional, though there is some use of quartal harmonies and

polychords. The form is a long structure with many sections, much like a rondo. The melody has more consistency than that of *Noon Song*, with entire sections of melody and accompaniment repeated more or less verbatim. This piece fits squarely within the bossa nova or Latin jazz tradition. Several sections have a tonic pedal throughout.

Ballad for Anna

Ballad for Anna is in E-flat minor, with many departures from the tonic. The harmonies are quite complex, combining highly extended chords, polychords, and quartal harmonies. The texture is often dense, and chords are inverted and altered to the extent that it is sometimes impossible (and often fruitless) to determine a root at all. The melody consists mainly of one motive, which is set in many different tonal contexts. The tempo is slow and there is no meter signature, though a good bit of the piece could be felt in triple meter. There is little reference to any traditional jazz idioms, such as swing rhythm or typical jazz chord progressions. More than any other of the pieces to be studied, *Ballad for Anna* is a manifestation of the influence of 20th-century classical music.

Song of the Wind

Like *Noon Song*, *Song of the Wind* is a series of variations on a repeated chord progression. It is also

similar to *Noon Song* in that the variations are organized within a larger formal context. In the case of *Song of the Wind*, the variations are divided into three large sections: a slow introduction, a jazz waltz in a faster tempo, and a coda. The jazz waltz contains the only significant use of swing rhythm in the *Piano Improvisations*. The variations are different from those in *Noon Song*: in addition to the harmonic progression, much of the melodic framework is also retained from one variation to another. However, only in some sections is the harmonic language in *Song of the Wind* based on traditional tertian harmony. There are quite a few quartal chords, polychords, and other sonorities which cannot be identified as triads. Several keys are weakly tonicized, but in the end there is no clear tonic. A possible explanation of this is discussed in the detailed analysis of the piece in chapter 6.

Sometime Ago

Sometime Ago is the longest piece to be studied. It is almost entirely in A minor, with a few short areas of A major. There is substantial use of a tonic pedal in the bass. There are many short subsections, but three main parts: a slow opening section (perhaps too lengthy to be called an introduction), a long section in Latin rhythm, and a coda. Texture is an important factor in setting off the first section from the rest of the piece. The first

section consists of a unison melody, two octaves apart, interrupted by brief contrasting areas. This section is very reminiscent of traditional Spanish music. The second section again uses the bossa nova or Latin jazz convention. Much of this section sounds very similar to *Song for Sally*. The harmonic language is also similar to that of *Song for Sally*: much of the piece uses traditional harmony, with relatively short excursions to more adventurous sonorities. The piece is also similar to the other *Piano Improvisations* in that melodic variation is an important element.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The nature of jazz is such that it is, by and large, an aural rather than written tradition. This is probably the greatest obstacle to analysis, since theorists generally depend on the written score. For this reason the analysis of jazz depends on recordings and the availability of transcriptions of jazz music.¹

The analysis of jazz is a relatively new phenomenon. Nevertheless, there has been a variety of approaches to analyzing jazz. These approaches have been described by Gary Potter in his article, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz."² He divides the various approaches into categories, placing them in approximate chronological order according to when the methods came into use.

One of the earliest and most rudimentary methods consisted of transcribing solos and relating the notes of the solo to the underlying harmonies. This method commonly appeared in *Down Beat* magazine beginning in the early 1950s. While there is some merit in this approach, there are several problems. Many elements of the music are not addressed: formal, linear, and motivic issues, to name a few. There is also the problem of deciding which set of chord changes to use. Songs often appear with different harmonizations in different fake books. Even assuming that all the players learned the piece from the

same source, players often develop their own variations over time, so that members of an ensemble may not all have the same harmonization in mind. It is also possible that harmonies could be ambiguous, even assuming that a transcription has been made and that the notes in the chords are known. While the relation of the notes in the solo to the underlying harmonies is useful on some levels, it is rather limited as a means of gaining comprehensive understanding of the music.

A second approach is based on the perception that players tend to use the same patterns (or formulas) many times within a given solo, and indeed in many solos. One of the earliest studies to use this approach was a dissertation by Thomas Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," from 1974.³ This work showed the prevalence of such patterns in 250 solos of Charlie Parker in which Owens identifies around 100 formulas that are used over and over.

Some writers have compared the process of jazz improvisation to that used in the oral improvisation of the Homeric bards. Albert Lord concluded that the oral epic poets learned and composed their songs by employing a large number of formulas. Lord defines a formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."⁴ This idea was first applied to music in relation to

Gregorian chant. Leo Treitler's study, "Homer and Gregory: The Transmission of Oral Poetry and Plainchant," appeared in 1974.⁵ The first studies to use this approach in relation to jazz are "Lester Young's 'Shoeshine Boy'," a paper by Lawrence Gushee,⁶ and "Adderley, Coltrane, and Davis at the Twilight of Bebop: The Search for Melodic Coherence (1958-1959)," a dissertation by Barry Kernfeld.⁷ Kernfeld demonstrates a degree of motivic relation within solos, accomplished by different means among the three musicians studied. The study that adheres most closely to the techniques of Parry and Lord is Gregory Smith's dissertation, "Homer, Gregory, and Bill Evans? The Theory of Formulaic Composition in the Context of Jazz Piano Improvisation."⁸ This work examines several issues that are central to analysis of jazz. One of the most pressing is the question of whether it is appropriate to analyze improvised music using the same tools as in analyzing written composition. Smith asserts that the types of motivic connections found in composed music are not possible in improvised music, stating that Schenkerian analysis of jazz does not "take the circumstances of composition in performance fully into account."⁹ He also makes subtle but important distinctions between true formulaic analysis and motivic or "centonate" analysis. According to Smith, "it is not the formulas themselves that are the critical element in formulaic composition,

but the patterns which generate the formulas. A singer of epic tales does not have to learn a large number of formulas, but only few basic patterns."¹⁰ Once the basic patterns are learned the singer (or musician) can substitute key words (or notes) to fit the particular context. In the realm of formulaic analysis, there is the problem of defining what constitutes a formula: uniqueness? duration? direction of motion? functionality? In the end, Smith bases his formulas on the criteria of direction of motion and diatonic reference points (relative to the given harmony, not the overall tonality of the song).¹¹

In his study, "Two Coltranes," Barry Kernfeld avoids the problem of identifying the individual formulas by pointing out "formula networks."¹² This approach is capable of showing a relationship between many different melodic lines without having to choose one original form from which they were derived. In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, Kernfeld provides useful frameworks for approaching improvisation. He outlines three main types: paraphrase improvisation, the ornamental variation of a theme; formulaic improvisation, creation of new material from a body of fragmentary ideas; and motivic improvisation, creation of new material from a single fragmentary idea.¹³

Schenkerian analysis has also been applied to jazz. The most notable study is Steven Larson's dissertation, "Schenkerian Analysis of Modern Jazz."¹⁴ This work discusses some of Schenker's ideas regarding improvisation, particularly the indistinct boundary between improvisation and composition. It also applies the theories of Schenker to specific works--piano solos by Bill Evans--and demonstrates that long-range relationships are possible in improvised music. There is also an article by Milton Stewart, "Some Characteristics of Clifford Brown's Improvisational Style," which uses Schenkerian methods.¹⁵ Thomas Owens' dissertation on the works of Charlie Parker also contains some graphic, Schenkerian analyses, though these are not a major part of the work.

Another reductive approach has been used by Kent Williams, who has approached bebop music with the implication-realization theories of Leonard Meyer and Eugene Narmour.¹⁶ Williams makes the case that the roots of bebop improvisation can be found in the "heads" or composed melodies at the beginning of the tune in question.

One of the newest approaches to jazz analysis attempts to draw parallels between music and spoken language. In their article "Miles Davis Meets Noam Chomsky: Some Observations in Jazz Improvisation and

Language Structure," Alan Perlman and Daniel Greenblatt apply various linguistic theories to jazz.¹⁷ The various levels of language are compared to the levels of jazz music (i.e. harmonic progression, possible pitches or scale, and the actual melody). Common chord progressions are compared to commonly used phrases in speech.

Yet another approach to jazz is the application of pitch class set analysis. Efforts along these lines have been made by both Jeff Pressing¹⁸ and Steven Block.¹⁹ This approach can be applied to both vertical (harmonic) and horizontal (melodic) elements.

One of the main issues that has been raised is whether it is appropriate to analyze improvised music and written composition in the same way. This tends to divide the approaches into those that focus more on the process that goes into creating the music, and those that focus on the music as an extant artifact. The formulaic and linguistic approaches belong in the former category, while set theory, Schenkerian, and motivic approaches belong in the latter. While each approach shows the music in a different light, they should not be mutually exclusive. Sooner or later most formulaic studies discuss the transcriptions of solos (an "artifact"), at which point they have some common ground with the motivic approaches.

Closely related to this issue is the question of whether the relationships, coherence, and other elements

found in the "compositional" studies of jazz are really possible in improvised music. Larson makes a strong case for improvised and composed music being merely two points along a continuum, rather than opposite poles.²⁰ Paul Berliner, in what is probably the most extensive study of how jazz improvisation is learned and practiced, demonstrates that this is an immensely complex process beginning in childhood and continuing throughout a musician's life.²¹ It is dangerous to assume that we can determine with any certainty the mental process involved in all improvisation, and even more so to assume that we can determine what is possible or not in improvised music. As Berliner points out, improvisation is not really playing without preparation, but rather, playing spontaneously from a lifetime of preparation.²²

Schenker's ideas on improvisation are also worth noting. In "The Art of Improvisation," Schenker makes some interesting points as to the nature of music and improvisation: "Everything in music proceeds . . . from this procreative force. Nevertheless, all procreation is the spontaneous gift of life-bestowing nature."²³ The key word here in regard to improvisation is spontaneous. Later, he states the process by which he believes masterworks are created: "The presence of mind with which our geniuses mastered tonal material made it possible for them to create far-reaching syntheses. Their works are

not merely pieced together, but are immediately sketched . . . and are carried out by a mysterious intuitive background."²⁴ The words "immediately," "mysterious," and "intuitive" are all frequently associated with improvisation. He makes the same point as Berliner when he states that the musicians can only accomplish this after the preparation of mastering the tonal material. The technical work of composing often takes place at such a subconscious level that the boundary between improvisation and composition can be very thin indeed. Schenker's views are borne out in examples throughout music history. Beethoven, Chopin, and many others were admired for their improvisations at the keyboard. J.S. Bach reportedly improvised fugues²⁵ and Mozart wrote that he improvised the Piano Sonata K. 330.²⁶ The first movement of the sonata is particularly interesting: notwithstanding its improvised origin, the first theme, second theme, and development are shown to be related by motivic parallelism.²⁷

In modern times we have a great advantage in understanding improvisation: the existence of recordings. In the case of the five Chick Corea *Piano Improvisations*²⁸ which are the subject of this study, there is also an excellent transcription by Bill Dobbins.²⁹ This makes it possible to discuss the harmony and voice-leading in more

detail than would working from a transcription containing only a melody line and chord symbols.

In his article on analyzing jazz, Potter calls for an eclectic approach, using whatever methods are appropriate for the purposes of the study. Potter advises that the analyst should consider two questions: 1. Why analyze this music? and 2. For whom is the analysis intended?³⁰ As for the first question, jazz is an extremely rich body of music, which is still largely unexplored in serious musical analysis. Chick Corea's *Piano Improvisations* in particular are intriguing in that they inhabit the indistinct areas between improvisation and composition, as well as between classical music and jazz. As for the intended audience, the present study is intended for any serious student of music.

The study uses whatever methods seem appropriate to the understanding of the pieces. Much of the analysis uses methods commonly applied to classical music, focusing on form, harmony, and motivic material. Quasi-Schenkerian methods such as reductions of harmonies and melodic lines are also used, though the analyses are not strictly Schenkerian, and Schenkerian jargon is largely avoided. The aim of the study was to use language and terminology that will be understandable without specialized knowledge of jazz or of any particular theoretical approach.

The analytical methods used reveal a great deal about the *Piano Improvisations*, much of which may not be immediately apparent to the listener. Some of the most compelling revelations stem from motivic analysis showing unity within pieces and, to a certain extent, between all of the *Piano Improvisations*. Though Corea uses a variety of styles and approaches, there are common elements that provide a degree of consistency and even point to the possibility of cyclic elements in the *Piano Improvisations*.

CHAPTER 3

NOON SONG

The title of *Noon Song* is appropriate: it is perhaps the brightest of the *Piano Improvisations* in mood and the only one in an unambiguous major key. *Noon Song* strikes the listener as an exuberant outpouring of spontaneous melody, but it is also based on a well defined formal structure.

At the most basic level, *Noon Song* is a continuous set of free variations, each based on the same chord progression. There is no melodic theme on which the variations are based; formal articulations are created by changes of tempo, rhythm, texture, and local harmonic activity. The piece contains eight variations, and is divided into two large sections of four variations each. This creates a structure in which two different formal approaches or levels exist simultaneously. The use of a repeated chord progression provides continuity and unity, while the two-part structure of the piece is based on contrast and division.

Though these two trends contrast with each other, they are not mutually exclusive. The coexistence of these two formal approaches is central to the nature of the piece. Virtually every element of the music helps to create this mixture, or is subject to it. This is true of

the form, harmonies and tonal areas used, motivic activity, rhythm, and texture.

The following chart shows how this is manifested in the form and tonal areas used:

PART ONE

Var 1	Var 2		Var 3	Var 4
1 - 6	7 - 13 - 18		18 - 24	24 - 35
Dmaj	Dmaj Fmaj Dmaj		Dmaj	Dmaj

PART TWO

Var 5	Var 6	Var 7	Var 8 (Coda)
36 - 45	46 - 53	54 - 67	68 - 75
F#maj Dmaj	Fmaj Dmaj	Cmaj Dmaj	Fmaj Dmaj

There are several formal elements that add to the unity of the piece. The most obvious of these is that every variation uses the standard chord progression and ends in the tonic key of D major. Furthermore, every variation, regardless of how it begins, eventually returns to the music of the opening section.

Other formal elements show the two-part nature of the piece. Part one never leaves the tonic key. Indeed the F major chord at m. 13 (which is not tonicized) is the only harmony in part I that is foreign to D major. Part two, on the other hand, contains many departures from the tonic. These range from the unprepared F# major harmony at the beginning of the variation 5 to tonicizations F major and its dominant in variations 6-8. Though each variation in part two ends in D major, they all begin away from the tonic.

As the piece progresses, the variations depart more radically from the original harmonic progression. These departures, along with the tonal and harmonic elements, are the main factors that establish a binary division of the piece.

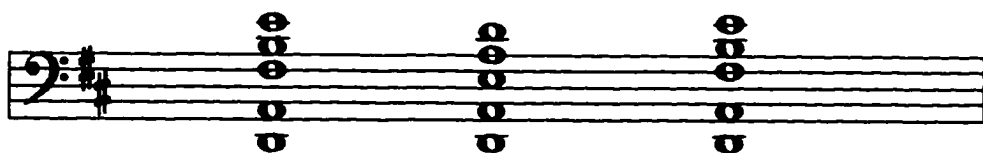
Variation 1 presents the standard chord progression in its original form:



This is a very traditional, tonal harmonic progression which can easily be expressed in terms of functional harmony: I V7/vi vi V7/V V7 I. Other than the movement from D to F-sharp 7, the motion is guided by the circle of 5ths.

In addition to the chords themselves, the voicings generally remain the same throughout the piece as well. Note that even though the harmonies are tertian, the use of extended chords allows for quartal voicings. This is the case in the upper three notes in all the chords except those in m. 4. The areas of D major harmony in this variation, and indeed throughout the piece, are often prolonged using a neighbor chord (also voiced in 4ths)

which alternates with the D major chord. In variation 1 this occurs in mm. 1 and 6:



The sound of this chord has the effect of not quite being either on or off the tonic, similar to a dominant chord over a tonic pedal.

Variation 2 also adheres closely to the standard chord progression, though the full progression is preceded by a partial statement at mm. 7-10. The most noteworthy change is the appearance of an F major chord at m. 13:

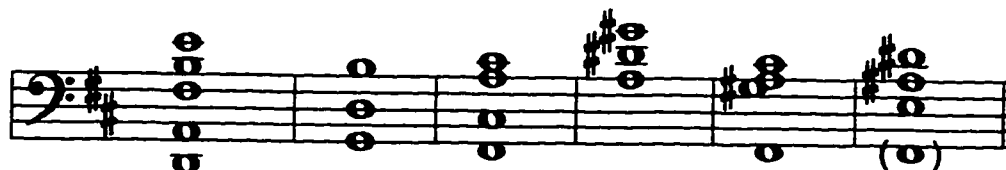


Though F is not tonicized here, its appearance forecasts significant areas of F major later in the piece. The way in which the chord is used--as a neighbor chord between two F-sharp 7 chords--also foreshadows the manner in which other excursions from the tonic will be treated.

Variation 3 (mm. 18-24) proceeds through the progression normally until m. 21, where the usual dominant harmony is replaced by an A major seventh chord. After a

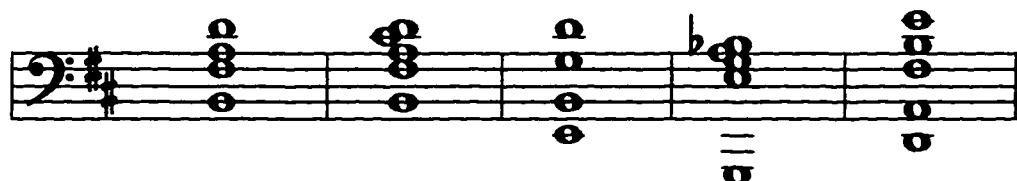
prolongation of A major 7, the progression backtracks to the F-sharp chord at m. 22 and then ends in the usual way.

In variation 4 several new chords are interposed into the standard progression (mm. 25-30):



G major (IV) appears at m. 26, between D major and F-sharp. When F-sharp arrives it is F-sharp minor, which is prolonged until m. 30 where it is converted to the standard F-sharp dominant sonority.

The cadential area which is usually harmonized with V7 I, now contains the following progression (mm. 31-35):



Note that the E chord is now minor rather than major, hence no longer functioning as V/V. The following chord is not A (V), but G minor (borrowed iv). This is the chord preceding the tonic, resulting in a plagal cadence (with minor iv) rather than the standard authentic cadence. These changes, especially when combined with the crescendo in dynamics and the particularly long time spent on the tonic after its arrival, make for a more dramatic

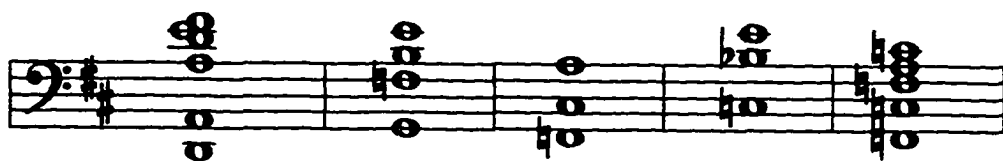
close for this section than for any so far. This is appropriate, as this variation brings part one to a close.

Variation 5 (mm. 36-43) is quite audibly different from that which comes before. One of the main reasons for this is the change in rhythm. Beginning at m. 36 the slow *sensa misura* feel gives way to a fast tempo with definite beats and a feeling of 5/4. The texture also changes, from florid melodies accompanied by arpeggiated chords with lots of pedal, to a jumpy staccato melody accompanied by staccato block chords. There is also a change in the treatment of the progression. Variation 5 goes through the standard progression twice, beginning each time on V7/vi rather than I. The overall effect of this is that even though the standard progression is in use, B minor rather than D is emphasized.

The main harmonic variation in variation 5 occurs at the beginning of the section; the end of the section returns to the tonic. This is the paradigm for variations 5 through 8.

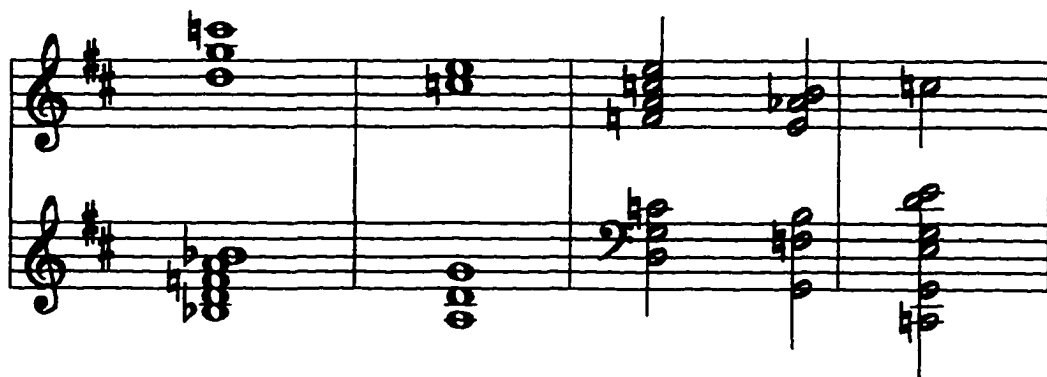
In variation 6, beginning at m. 46, the tonality shifts towards F major (flat III). There has been some preparation for the key of F through the F major chord at m. 13 as well the use of a G minor harmony (ii in F) at m. 34. The move to F is accomplished by using the D major harmony at the end of m. 45 as a dominant. This sets off a progression through the circle of fifths leading to a

strong cadence on F at m. 49. There is a slight detour at m. 47: a "premature" arrival on F. (mm. 45-49):



At m. 50 F major slides up to F-sharp 7 (V/vi), returning to the standard progression. This half-step motion is identical to that which occurred where F first appeared at m. 13-14. The chromatic neighbor concept has been expanded from an single chord to an entire section. From m. 50 the progression continues in the usual manner, ending on the tonic at m. 53.

Variation 7 also begins off the tonic, gravitating towards the dominant of F, C major. After beginning on a B-flat major 7th chord the harmony descends a half step to A minor. At this point a circle of fifths progression is initiated (reminiscent of the approach to F major in the variation 5), culminating in a ii V I cadence in C major at m. 57 (mm. 54-57).



At m. 58 C major slides down to B minor. This is similar to the manner in which the two F major sections were "resolved." Though the movement is down rather than up, the chromatic neighbor concept definitely applies. When B minor (vi in D) is reached, the tonality returns to D major and the standard progression. The progression is completed from the point of return to B minor, and then repeated in its entirety. In the tonic cadences of both statements, A7 (V) has been replaced by G minor (iv). This is identical to the plagal cadence used at the end of the fourth variation. It is also similar in that the dynamics are loud and there is a long denouement on the tonic. As in the previous case, this helps to provide a more dramatic close to the section. Again this is appropriate, as this section ends the main body of the piece.

The Coda or variation 8 is similar to variation 6. The left hand accompaniment in the two sections is nearly identical. (m. 46; m. 68):



The rhythm and contour of the melody are also similar. In terms of harmony, both sections begin on a version of the ii chord in F (ii7 at m. 68, V/V at m. 46) and go on to strong cadences in F major.

At m. 71 F major descends to E minor, ii in D major. Once again a section outside of D major "resolves" by half-step to a chord in the diatonic progression. This time the motion is down to ii (similar to mm. 57-58) rather than the usual motion up to V/vi. The remainder of the section follows the standard progression.

While there is no secondary key area equal in significance to that of a sonata form, for example, F major fulfills a similar function in this piece. Rather than serving as the tonic of a large section, F major guides the tonality of several short sections of music. This creates a structure with several small departures from the tonic, rather than one main departure. These areas of tonal departure are also distinctive in other ways: motives used, texture, rhythm, etc.

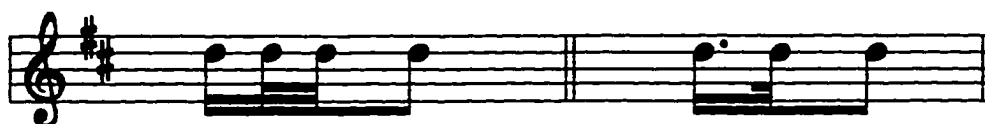
One manifestation of the tension between D major and F major is the conflict between the pitches A# and B-flat. Though A# is not diatonic in the key of D, it is, of course, present in every F#7 chord (V7/vi). A-sharp is also present in almost every appearance of the V7/V chord, as an added sharp 4th (or 11th). B-flat, on the other hand, is crucial to the tonicization of F major, functioning as both the 7th in the dominant chord and the 3rd in the ii chord.

In the case of the plagal cadences at the end of variations 4 and 7, G minor serves as the borrowed

subdominant in D major. The appearance of B-flat in the context of D major, particularly at such important points in the form, helps to form a link between F major and D major.

The treatment of form and harmony/tonality plays a major role in creating the mixture of contrast and unity in *Noon Song*, but motivic elements are equally important in this regard. The same motives are used throughout the piece, but they are used differently in parts one and two.

The main motive, designated x, is a descending stepwise figure in one of the following rhythms:



The interval spanned by the motive varies, though it is usually a fourth or a major third. There is often a stepwise ascent over the dominant leading up to the motive which occurs over the tonic. The first occurrence of this is at mm. 5-6:



This motive, or a version of it, appears at virtually every tonic arrival in the piece. While there are arrivals on the tonic within sections (mm. 11, 39, and 59), the most important cadences are at the ends of the sections (mm. 6, 18, 24, 35, 44, 53, 67, and 75). The treatment of the x motive at these points is another feature that supports the binary division of *Noon Song*.

The cadence at the end of variation 1, seen in the previous example, uses a version of the motive that descends through $\hat{8} \hat{7} \hat{6} \hat{5}$. This version of the motive, designated x1, is used at the cadential points in all of part one: variations 1-4. The motive is varied slightly in variation 2 where the motive begins one step higher than usual, (m. 18):



The cadences in part two use the x motive, but in new versions. The end of variation 5, for example, uses the following version of the motive, designated x2 (m. 43):



Variation 8 also uses this version of the motive in the cadence at m. 75. The x2 motive covers a major third ($\hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1}$) rather than a fourth ($\hat{8} \hat{7} \hat{6} \hat{5}$). The descent to $\hat{1}$ gives

x2 a more final quality than does the movement from $\hat{8}$ to $\hat{5}$ in x1. This corresponds logically with the placement of x1 in the beginning of the piece and x2 at the end.

The version of the motive used in the cadences of the variations 6 and 7 is a hybrid of x1 and x2. It spans a major third like x2, but uses scale steps $\hat{7} \hat{6} \hat{5}$ rather than $\hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1}$ --similar to a truncated x1. This version, designated x3, first appears at the end of the variation 6 section at m. 53.



It also appears at both tonic cadences of variation 7 at mm. 62 and 67.

The chart below provides an overall view of the motives used relative to the form.

PART ONE				
Variation	1	2	3	4
Motive	x1	x1	x1	x1
Measure	6	18	24	35
PART TWO				
Variation	5	6	7	8
Motive	x2	x3	x3	x2
Measure	43	53	67	75

In this format it is easy to see the motivic contribution to the binary division of *Noon Song*.

Various versions of the x motive also appear at other, less important structural points, including tonic arrivals in the middle of sections (mm. 11, 39, and 62)

and in various prolongations of final harmony (mm. 6, 44 and 45, and 67).

Other manifestations of the x motive play a lesser, though significant role in the piece. One of these, designated x4, consists of two descending eighth notes, often a third or fourth apart: basically the skeleton of the other x motives. Considered in isolation, it would be difficult to hear a relationship between x4 and the other x motives. The context in which x4 appears makes the relationship much more viable. Like the other occurrences of x, x4 is used at points of climax--generally strong harmonic arrivals. The most striking example of this occurs at the first strong cadence on F major at mm. 48-49.



This example, in which x4 is basically the skeleton of x1, also shows another contextual relation to x1. The stepwise ascent in the melody over a dominant harmony is the standard cadential formula throughout the piece. The ascent invariably leads to some form of the x motive. The other occurrences of x4 share these same attributes, though the harmonies involved are not necessarily a local dominant and tonic. The x4 motive also appears at mm. 13

and 15, and becomes the basis of an area of music from mm. 60 to 66.

The versions of the x motive are the most important motivic material of the piece. There is, however, another motive that plays a substantial role. This motive, designated y, consists of three notes: a beginning note descends to a repeated tone. The rhythm is generally even, often with the feel of a triplet. The lower notes are usually chord tones, while the first note is an upper neighbor. The y motive is first seen at the last note of the right hand of m. 1, and the first two notes of m. 2. It is seen below in a more basic form (without the intervening barline and in a lower register):



The y motive appears in several forms and contexts. It often occurs as part of the ornate melody in the right hand. It is also the origin of the theme at m. 7.



A small section of music in measure 21 is also based on y, this time in retrograde form.



At m. 5 the motive is heard in an inverted form which is then extended upwards. This generates a stepwise ascent which is part of the cadential formula used throughout the piece. (m. 5):



The melody at the beginning of variation 6 is a variant of the y motive in augmentation. (mm. 45-46):



The next section uses the y motive in a decorated version. This occurs at the cadence in C major and again at the return to the vi chord in the diatonic progression in D major (mm. 57-58).



The contour and rhythm provided by the added note create a hybrid of the x and y motives.

The discussion of the x and y motives has centered on their appearance at important points in the structure. They are also part of the melody in many other places of lesser importance which are too numerous to mention.

The x and y motives are used throughout the piece. There is another theme that is important only in variation 5. It first appears at m. 36.



Though the contour and intervallic content vary, the rhythm and articulation are constant. This theme is repeated several times forming a consistent phrase structure from m. 36 to m. 40. This regularity, a quality lacking in variations 1-4, is a significant factor in creating contrast between parts one and two.

Rhythmic characteristics also play a role in distinguishing the two sections of the piece. The first section is in a moderately slow tempo, almost entirely without a regular pulse. There are what seem to be downbeats--the low notes of the left hand--but between them there is no consistent pulse. The second section contains a substantial amount of music that does have a regular beat. This contrast is especially evident at the beginning of the B section, which has a strong metric feel of 5/4, as well as a fast tempo. Other areas with a regular beat are mm. 36-42, mm. 46-48, mm. 54-58, mm. 60-66, and mm. 68-69.

Along with the contrast in rhythm, there is a corresponding difference in texture. In the non-metric sections of the first part, the left hand generally plays some sort of arpeggiated figure while the right hand plays a highly ornate melody. In the more metric sections of the second part, the left hand plays more bass notes followed by block chords in a regular metric pattern.

There are qualities of *Noon Song*, particularly the use of the theme-and-variation genre, that are typical of improvised music. However, in many ways *Noon Song* is extraordinary. The gradual introduction of a secondary key area is unusual, as are the subtle ways in which the contrast between the two key areas is played out. The economy of motivic materials provides coherence, while the variation of motives adds contrast and definition. The unusual aspects of *Noon Song* are not ends in themselves, but contribute to the creation of the two-part form. All of the musical elements, common and uncommon, interact to form a balanced, multilevel, formal structure. This skillful layering of different formal approaches permeates the music and is the most fascinating quality of *Noon Song*.

CHAPTER 4

SONG FOR SALLY

The main stylistic traits of *Song for Sally* are its use of Latin rhythm, rondo form, motivic economy, quartal and quintal harmonies, and pedal points. Rhythm is the most important factor in giving the piece its character. Unlike *Noon Song*, there is a steady beat throughout, moving at a moderately fast tempo. The rhythm has the flavor of a bossa nova or Latin jazz style. This rhythmic background is created by the left hand accompaniment figuration, which is present throughout most of the piece:



The left hand pattern uses a pedal point on the tonic (A minor), creating a constancy of tonality as well as rhythm. The right hand lines tend to be syncopated, playing off the steadiness of the accompaniment.

The piece is in rondo form with a large number of short sections:

A1 1-----16 16	B 17-----29 13	A2 30-----37 8	C 38-----49 12	A1 50-----65 16
B 66-----76 11	A3 77-----92 16	B 93-----103 11	A2 104-----111 8	C 112-----124 13
A1 125-----142 18	B 143-----153 11	A2 154-----161 8	C 162-----173 12	A3 174-----187 14

The analogous sections are quite similar from one appearance to the next. The B and C are also similar to each other, at least near the beginning of the sections. The A sections are even more similar with each other; indeed, if not for subtle differences in phrasing and length it would be impossible to distinguish them at all. The sections can be grouped into larger segments, the basic unit being some rendition of A B A C.

A1 B A2 C	A1 B	A3 B A2 C	A1 B A2 C	A3 (Coda)
1-----49	50-76	77----124	125---173	174---187
49	27	48	49	14

There are three complete segments, one incomplete segment (mm. 50-76), and a coda.

As stated above, the main differences between the A sections are created by differences in phrasing. One of the most notable features of the A1 sections is that they all end with the same eight measures of music. These eight measures are made up of a four-measure melody which is repeated, usually in a slightly varied version. Before this there are usually eight measures (ten at mm. 125-134) of less structured, improvisatory music using melodic material similar to that in the last eight measures. The A2 sections are exactly like the last eight measures of the A1 sections, without the preceding improvisatory music. The A3 sections do not quite follow the syntax of the other A sections. They contain a combination of the recognizable melody from the second half of A1 and the

more improvisatory material similar to that in the first half of A1. The placement of the more structured, recognizable melody is not consistent with that of A1 (filling the last eight measures), but rather the melody can occur at any point in the A3 sections. Furthermore, in A3 the four-measure melody is not repeated to form the eight measure periods of A1.

The A3 sections are important points of articulation in this rather symmetrical form, occurring only at the approximate middle and the end of the piece. The final A3 section serves as a coda; the first serves as a midpoint. This effect is heightened by its placement between two B sections--the only point in the piece at which there are two B sections without an intervening C section (the point where the implied pattern is broken).

All of the significant melodic material in *Song for Sally* can be derived from a single motive, which will be called x. It consists of a stepwise descent through a major third, usually E D C, or $\hat{5} \hat{4} \hat{3}$ in A minor. This is the motive which forms the melody heard in A1 or the second half of A2. Its first appearance is at the upbeat to measure 9:



Throughout the piece this motive is varied and transformed. The second statement of the melody is often varied in the following manner, first appearing at the upbeat to measure 13:



At the B section the motive is extended, though the first three notes are the same. The rhythm is changed somewhat, though the general feel of upbeat to downbeat remains. (m. 17):



At measure 19 there is a new melody which is related somewhat more distantly to the original:



This seems to be a combination of the rhythm of the first half of m. 17 (quarter, eighth, eighth), with the melodic contour of the second half of m. 17 and the first beat of m. 18 (descending broken triad). This figure is then repeated two more times, at m. 22 and m. 25.

The C section begins almost exactly like B, but the melody is extended even more (mm. 37-39):



The following measures use a variant of the motive, in which the first note is sometimes omitted, (mm. 39-45):



The use of the motivic material in the sections just discussed is similar in all of the corresponding sections. In addition to the parts of the piece which stay basically the same throughout, the more improvisatory parts of A2 and A3 are also based on the x motive. The rhythm is usually varied, so that the melody is not as recognizable as in the A1 sections, but the descent through $\hat{5} \hat{4} \hat{3}$ is retained, often followed by continuing stepwise descent to the tonic:



This same procedure, albeit with a varied rhythm is then repeated an octave lower. A very similar procedure is also used in the A2 section at mm. 125-133, descending through $\overset{\wedge}{5} \overset{\wedge}{4} \overset{\wedge}{3} \overset{\wedge}{2} \overset{\wedge}{1}$, in two octaves. The A3 section at the end (mm. 174-187) follows a similar pattern, descending through $\overset{\wedge}{5} \overset{\wedge}{4} \overset{\wedge}{3} \overset{\wedge}{2} \overset{\wedge}{1}$ this time in three octaves. The final statement, which is set apart from the others, retains the recognizable form from A1 creating an effect of closure.

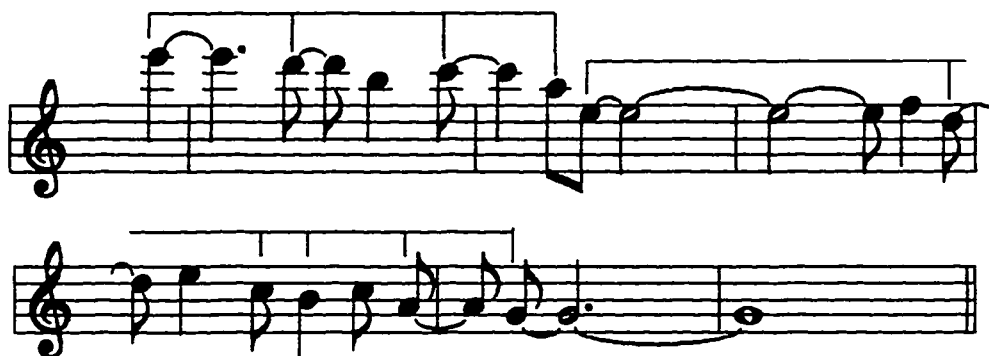
Though not as obvious, large parts of the C sections are also based on stepwise descent from $\overset{\wedge}{5}$ to $\overset{\wedge}{1}$, this time in the scale of A major. (mm. 40-50):



As is the case throughout the piece, the descent is divided in half, from $\overset{\wedge}{5}$ to $\overset{\wedge}{3}$ and $\overset{\wedge}{3}$ to $\overset{\wedge}{1}$. There is some hesitancy as the descent from E to D is repeated several times before reaching C-sharp. The descent to A is accomplished at mm. 47-48 and then repeated at mm. 49-50. The pitch A is reached only at the beginning of the next section, and only in the bass voice.

Within the eight measure periods that comprise the A2 sections and the end of the A1 sections, the motion is not

as consistent. In the first appearance of A1 and A2 (mm. 9-16 and 30-37), the melody descends through $\hat{5}$ $\hat{4}$ $\hat{3}$. In the other analogous sections (mm. 58-65, 104-111, 135-142, and 154-161), the motion terminates on $\hat{1}$. The two A3 areas are the most unusual. In both cases the melody arrives at $\hat{1}$ but does not stop there, so that $\hat{1}$ is not the final note of the phrase. In the A3 from mm. 77-92 the descent continues past $\hat{1}$ to $\hat{7}$. (mm. 84-90):



The final A3 section, on the other hand, reaches $\hat{1}$ by stepwise descent from $\hat{5}$, but then reverses direction, returning to $\hat{2}$. (mm. 183-187):



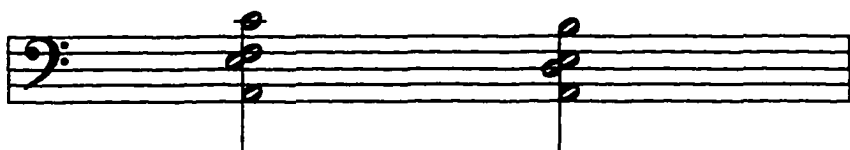
The difference between these two examples point to the differing roles of the two A3 sections. The first A3 section serves more or less as the midpoint of the piece and is not intended to provide a sense of closure. The

fact that the melody ends on $\hat{7}$ seems to leave it unresolved. In the final A3 section, there is a sense of closure, despite the fact that the melody does not end on the tonic note. One reason for this is that $\hat{2}$ (or $\hat{9}$) combines with the lower notes to form a more consonant chord than does $\hat{7}$. The final chord formed by the rise to $\hat{2}$ at m. 187 is:



This harmony is quite stable in its own way, being composed of two perfect fifths stacked on top of each other. This is particularly true in the context of this piece, which uses quartal and quintal harmonies frequently. The appearance of the main melody in a recognizable form, creating an echo effect, as well as the cessation of the rhythmic motion, also contribute to the effect of closure.

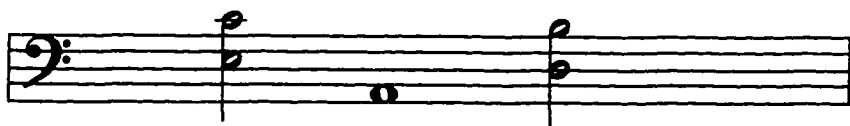
The piece is in A minor, from which it never strays. The A sections, of all types, are entirely over a tonic pedal, though the upper notes of the left hand shift back and forth between the following two harmonies:



The outer notes are quite clear, but the notes of the middle voice embody a certain amount of ambiguity as to which is the main note and which is the decorative neighbor. This leads to two possible interpretations of the harmonies, the first of which is shown below:



In this version, motion from $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{5}$ in the middle voice makes the first harmony a less stable chord which resolves a sort of "quintal tonic." The other possible interpretation is below:



In this version the first chord is a stable tonic, while the second is a G chord (VII) over a tonic pedal. Corea uses this paradox, playing on both interpretations of the harmonies in turn. In the A sections, the latter interpretation seems to be in effect: the alternation of harmonies ending on VII over the tonic implies the need for cadential extension, which is provided by the B and C sections. In the final A section the first interpretation of the harmonies applies, and the "quintal tonic" of A E B serves as a consonance in the final sonority of the piece.

Both the B and C sections begin on i and make their way to half cadences on V. Other than that, there are several differences between B and C. B begins with a cadence on the tonic: iv V i, in a sense serving as an arrival point for the rather static A section preceding it (mm. 17-18 and analogous measures). After that the bass descends through G, F-sharp, and F arriving at an E dominant chord with a flat 9th. This harmonic outline for the B sections can be shown as follows. (mm. 17-29):



The main chords in the iv v i cadence that begins the section are not pure triads. They all have a fourth, fifth and minor seventh, but no third. This is also true

of the G chord, which contains a fourth, minor seventh, and major ninth.

The C sections, though they begin very much like the B sections melodically, form more of a departure from the A sections when the harmony is considered. (mm. 38-49):



The section begins on the same chord as B, but the harmony takes a different turn immediately thereafter. The left hand plays parallel fifths during the first two measures of C, while the right hand fills the rest of the harmonies above. The second chord can be interpreted as a C augmented chord with a major seventh and ninth. There are, however, problems with this interpretation, particularly the presence of both G and G-sharp (both a

raised and perfect fifth). A more accurate explanation of the harmony is that it is a polychord, with a C chord in the left hand (missing the third) and an E dominant seventh chord in the right hand. The C sections do not cadence on the tonic, but dwell on the VI chord, moving back and forth from F major to E dom 7 or VI to V7 (mm. 40-45 and analogous). This alternation between VI and V is typical of the Latin style found both in this piece and in other *Piano Improvisations*. When the bass finally settles on V, the harmony above is an A major chord in second inversion (mm. 46-47 and analogous). This leads to a half cadence in A major, moving through ii to V dominant 7/9 (mm. 48-49 and analogous). The music from mm. 47-50 is basically a decoration of a cadential six-four to V in A major. The resolution occurs with the return to one of the A sections. Though there is no strong A major arrival with a root in the bass, the area of A major inflection serves an important function and provides the only contrast to A minor. This is pointed up by the different nature of the dominant harmonies at the end of the B and C sections. In B the dominant chord contains a minor ninth (F-natural) adding to the minor sound. In the C section the dominant chord has a major ninth (F-sharp). It is arrived at through the ii chord (B minor 7/9, which also contains an F-sharp, as well as a C-sharp). All of the analogous sections follow the same harmonic progressions.

Song for Sally is one of the more straightforward *Piano Improvisations* to be discussed, yet it is rich in subtle variation. Though most of the melodic activity is based on a single motive, there is a wealth of subtle rhythmic variation, ornamentation, and differences of articulation. The harmonic language is also interesting in its blend of traditional syntax and voicing in fourths and fifths. The combination of tuneful melodies, clear formal layout, and Latin style make *Song for Sally* very accessible to the listener. This probably accounts for the fact that an adaptation of the piece entitled *Sea Journey* has become a standard in the jazz repertoire.

CHAPTER 5

BALLAD FOR ANNA

Ballad for Anna is a rather mournful piece, due to its slow tempo and tonic key of E-flat minor. As the name implies, it is songlike, consisting largely of a series of long plaintive phrases. The "ballad" quality and features of the melody are important in understanding the nature of the piece.

In terms of harmony, it is one of the more complex of the *Piano Improvisations* to be studied. The majority of the chords are either polychords, quartal, rootless, greatly extended, or altered. Furthermore, it is often difficult to place the chords into a traditional functional context. Although there is strong tonic, traditional dominant relationships scarcely seem to apply: there are no dominant chords or leading tones in the tonic key. As a result, the E-flat areas of the piece should be considered to be in the natural minor or Aeolian mode. The result of these characteristics is that traditional analysis, based on functional harmonic progression and areas of tonicization, is of only limited effectiveness in examining this piece.

There are, however, elements that do shed light on the structure of *Ballad for Anna*. One of the most important of these is the use of a single motive

throughout the piece. This motive, designated x, first appears in mm. 2-3:



A common variant of the motive first appears at mm. 4-5:

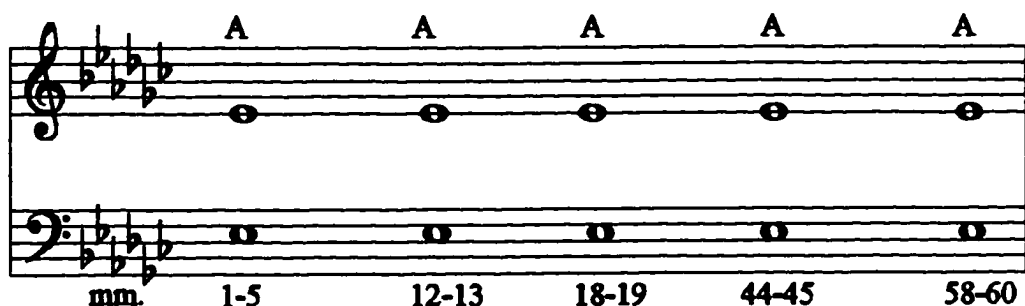


In either version, the most important feature of the x motive is the descent of a minor third, through $\hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1}$ in the tonic key. The interval of the third is also important in many other aspects of the piece, particularly harmonic motion, bass motion, and voice leading.

Another consistent feature of *Ballad for Anna* is the prominence of the pitch E-flat in the melody, particularly in combination with the x motive. The search for tonic support for the motive on E-flat is one of the most pressing issues of the piece, and plays a major role in generating the form. The relative importance of different points in the form is determined by the number of the three elements--use of the x motive, E-flat in the melody, and tonic harmonic support--that are present.

The areas that combine all three of these elements form the structural anchors of the piece. These pillars, designated A, are represented by whole notes in the

reduction below. The pitches have been placed in the same register for the sake of clarity.



The importance of the third is apparent in the choice of key for the only transposition of A (mm. 38-43). This area, designated A' is basically a transposition of the E-flat minor sections shown above into G minor. The appearance of the opening section, transposed and only slightly varied, serves as the strongest articulation of a key area outside the tonic. This makes A' an important structural event, though not quite equal in importance with the A sections in the tonic.

On a lower level of structural importance are places in which the x motive and E-flat are prominent in the melody, but the underlying harmonic and bass motion offer no tonic support. Again, the importance of the third is manifested in the bass motion, which begins on G-flat, a minor third above the tonic, and ends on C-natural, a

minor 3rd below the tonic. These sections, designated C, as well as A' are included in the chart below:

A musical chart showing sections A, C, and A' on a grand staff. The treble clef staff has whole notes, and the bass clef staff has half notes. The sections are labeled above the staff: A (1-5), A (12-13), A (18-19), C (27-30), A' (38-43), A (44-45), C (50-52), and A (58-60). The measure ranges are listed below the staff: mm. 1-5, 12-13, 18-19, 27-30, 38-43, 44-45, 50-52, 58-60.

Other sections, designated B, use some elements of the x motive or the A sections, but contain no statements of the x motive, no prominent E-flats in the melody, and no tonic harmony. The first B section ends on G-flat in the bass, leading to a return to the A section by minor third. These sections are included in the chart below:

A musical chart showing sections A, B, and C on a grand staff. The treble clef staff has whole notes, and the bass clef staff has half notes. The sections are labeled above the staff: A (1-4), A (12-13), B (14-17), A (18-19), B (20-23), C (27-30), A' (38-43), A (44-5), B (46-8), C (50-52), and A (58-60). The measure ranges are listed below the staff: mm. 1-4, 12-13, 14-17, 18-19, 20-23, 27-30, 38-43, 44-5, 46-8, 50-52, 58-60.

The sections in the chart above do not account for every measure. They are, rather, the main structural points of the piece.

The importance of the third in the long range bass motion has already been noted. Motion by third is also

quite common on the local level, as seen in the harmonic and melodic reduction of mm. 1-5:



The bass, most notes of the harmonies, and the main notes of the melody—all move in parallel motion by minor thirds, with the bass and melody moving in parallel octaves.

All of the A-sections throughout the piece are very similar. The A' section (mm. 37-43) also uses the x motive and the same basic harmonic progression transposed to G minor. There are, however, some important variations in the melody. Transposing the x motive to G minor would normally produce a descent through B-flat, A, G. This is the case at the beginning of A', but after that the melody focuses on other pitches. Below is a reduction of the appearances of the x motive in A' (mm. 37-43):

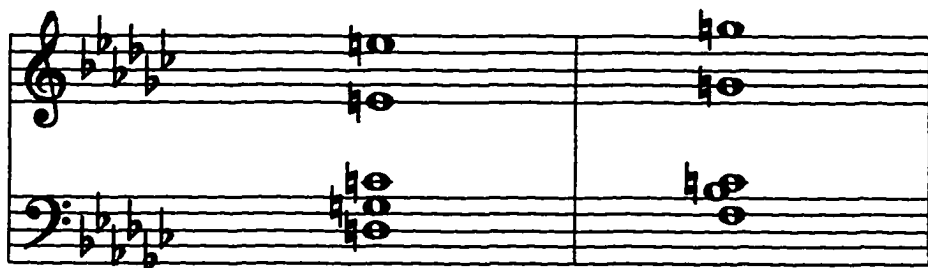


At mm. 39 and 42-43 the motive starts on E-flat and descends through D and C. At mm. 40-41 the motive ascends through E-flat, F, and G. This is done, not by inverting the motive, but by expanding on the lower neighbor idea present in the x motive. Compare the original x motive from mm. 2-3 with the version of the motive in mm. 40-41:



The overall effect of the changes in A' is that even though the section is in G minor, E-flat persists as an important note in the melody. The more agitated rhythm and louder dynamics reflect this conflict between the assertion of a foreign key in the harmony and the prominence of the tonic note in the melody.

Though the B sections do not contain the x motive, and sound very different from the A sections, they do share certain features. Below is a reduction of the first part of B, mm. 14-15.



The interval between the bass and the melody is a major 9th rather than an octave, but both move up a minor 3rd. As for the harmonies, the chords in m. 14-15 are an exact transposition of the chords in m. 1-2.

One of the more intriguing manifestations of the x motive occurs at mm. 23-27, which is basically a transitional passage. Below is a reduction of the melody and harmony from the end of the B section, through the transition, to the beginning of the C section (mm. 23-27):

The musical score reduction shows five measures of music. The melody (treble clef) and harmony (bass clef) are both in G-flat major. The melody starts on A-flat in measure 23 and moves up a minor 3rd to E-flat in measure 27. The harmony starts on G-flat in measure 23 and moves up a minor 3rd to B-flat in measure 27. The transition is marked by a '3rd' interval in the melody and a '3rd' interval in the bass. The chords in measures 24 and 25 are identical, and the chords in measures 26 and 27 are identical.

One unusual feature of the transition is that it does not accomplish any harmonic movement. The harmony at m. 23 and m. 27 is the same G-flat based sonority, prolonged by third motion in the bass (similar to the A and B sections). The goal of the transition seems to be melodic rather than harmonic. One of the critical features of the C section (mm. 27-30) is the predominance of E-flat in the melody. To achieve this, the main objective of the transition seems to be melodic motion from A-flat at m. 23 to E-flat at m. 27. This motion is accomplished in two stages, using two different manifestations of the x

motive. The initial motion from A-flat to B-natural (enharmonically a minor third) is very direct and parallels the movement in the bass. The melodic outline of mm. 24-27 shows a stepwise ascent (similar to the x motive variant in mm. 40-41) through a 3rd (enharmonically spelled as B, D-flat, E-flat). Though the 3rd is major rather than minor, this melodic outline follows the x motive in inversion. The decoration and octave displacement make this difficult to perceive: it is what might be termed a "hidden repetition" (or motivic parallelism) in Schenkerian terminology.

In addition to the original version, the x motive also exists in altered forms, as seen in mm. 5-6:

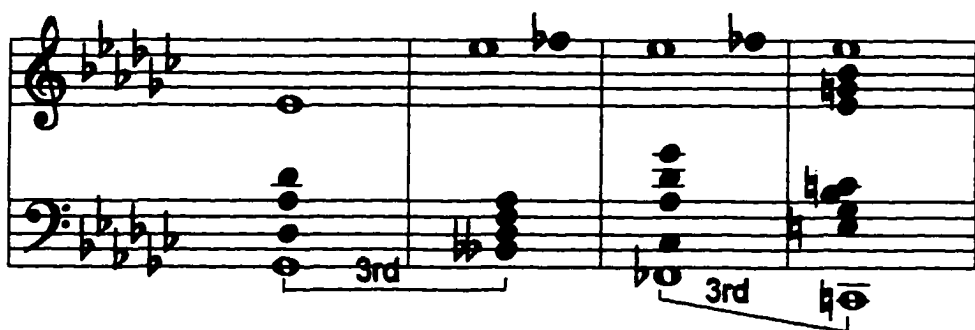


The motive beginning in m. 5 is basically the original x motive with a flat 2. In m. 6 the motive is varied more substantially. It is significant that the presence of F-flat occurs at the first departure from the tonic. F-flat signifies distance from the tonic in several places throughout the piece. In both of the C sections (m. 28-29 and mm. 49-50), the version of the x motive from m. 6 appears supported by the same harmony (a G-flat minor-

minor 7th with a major 9). The example below is from mm. 28-29:



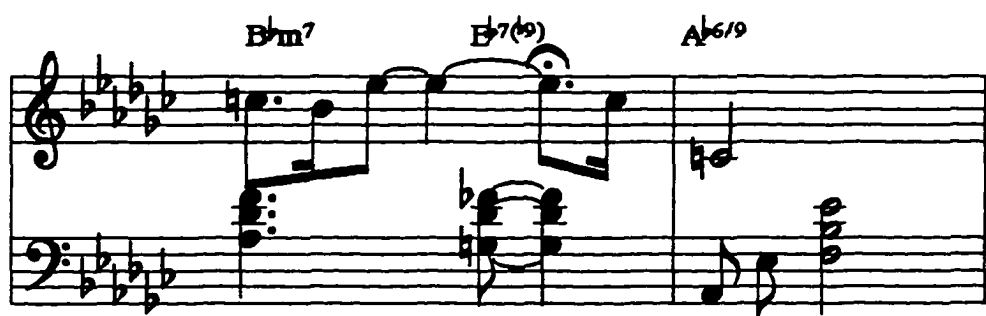
This version of the motive focuses on neighbor motion between F-flat and E-flat. The harmony is also affected by F-flat, as seen in the reduction of mm. 27-30:



The bass begins on G-flat (m. 27), raising the expectation of a descent through F to E-flat. The bass does descend, but through F-flat rather than F-natural. The descent bypasses E-flat, instead arriving at C-natural at m. 30. Though the chord at m. 30 supports E-flat, in that E-flat is a member of it, the chord is highly unstable. Its exact designation is C dominant 7th, with raised fifth and sharp ninth (enharmonically spelled as E-flat rather than D-sharp). Not only is the chord itself unstable, but E-flat is exposed in the most unstable position in the chord: the sharp 9th (the equivalent of a minor 3rd in a major chord).

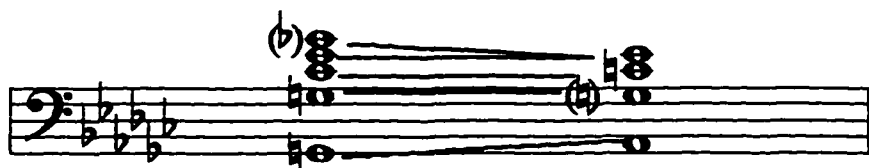
The final conflict between these two notes as indicators of being on or off the tonic occurs at mm. 49-57. The melody of the second C section alternates between E-flat and F-flat from mm. 49-52, halting on the unstable C sonority at m. 52. At m. 53 and more emphatically at m. 57 the melody pauses on F-natural. The F-natural, having helped to restore the tonic, leads directly to the return of the original x motive and the tonic.

In addition to the motion by third, there are also plagal cadences at important locations. Both the return to the A section at m. 11 and the final return to A at m. 57 are preceded by strong arrivals on A-flat major. The arrival at A-flat major at m. 10 is accomplished by a ii V I cadence (mm. 9-10):



Though the roots of the ii and V chords are in the melody rather than the bass, this constitutes a strong cadence--one of the few in the piece. The sonority in m. 54-55 is not as explicit as the dominant V chord in m. 9, but can be interpreted as an inverted E-flat sonority. Regardless

of the exact identity of the chord, the voice leading clearly shows a dominant function (mm. 54-56):



There are other plagal progressions in the B sections as seen in this example from mm. 16-17:



The same type of harmonic motion to G-flat also occurs at mm. 22-23 and 46-49.

Ballad for Anna is a masterful exploration of the possibilities of a single motive. This is played out in virtually every aspect of the piece. The appearances of the motive are the definitive factor in determining the form. Practically all of the significant melodic material is based on the motive, and the harmonic material, both short and long term, is based on the interval spanned by the motive: the 3rd. The motive itself serves to unify the piece, while variety is provided by the shifting angles from which the motive is viewed.

CHAPTER 6

SONG OF THE WIND

Like *Noon Song*, *Song of the Wind* is a series of variations over a repeated chord progression and bass line. It is also similar to *Noon Song* in that the variations are placed in a larger formal context. *Song of the Wind* is divided into three sections: a slow introduction, jazz waltz, and coda. The proportions are rather symmetrical, with the introduction balanced by the coda. The jazz waltz is divided into three sections of approximately equal length:

INTRO	/-----JAZZ WALTZ-----\ I II III			CODA
1-19	20-54	55-90	91-127	128-139
19	35	36	37	12

Unlike *Noon Song*, the variations in *Song of the Wind* not only use the same harmonic progression and bass line, but they retain much of the melodic framework as well.

With the exception of the coda, the entire piece consists of variations on a repeated bass pattern and chord progression. The introduction goes through the progression once, while the jazz waltz does so three times.

The treatment of the chord progression and bass line reflects the three part division of the piece. The final harmony of the progression is unstable, tending towards an open-ended nature. The open-ended quality is also

embodied in the bass line: the final two bass notes in the progression, D and E, are followed by an F-sharp at the beginning of the next variation, forming a continuous stepwise ascent. At the end of the introduction the motion stops and the piece pauses on the final harmony before going on to the jazz waltz. This allows the introduction to be separate from the jazz waltz, while still leading to it. Within the jazz waltz the open-ended nature of the chord progression and bass line is combined with rhythmic continuity from the end of one variation to the beginning of the next. The overall effect is to make the jazz waltz a cohesive section in the three-part form.

There are four main sections in each variation. These are defined by the bass line and harmonic progression. The prominent bass notes at the beginning of the four sections are F-sharp, E, B, and A. There is a minor key feel at the beginning of each section, though there is no real tonicization. The chart on the following pages is a reduction comparing the melody of the analogous sections for each variation. This outline represents the entire piece up to the coda (i.e. the parts of the piece that are based on the repeated bass line and harmonic progression). The individual "measures" or systems represent the four main sections within each variation.

Intro
1-5

Jazz
waltz:
I
20-26

II
55-62

III
91-98

Bass

Intro
6-8

Jazz
waltz:
I
27-34

II
63-69

III
99-104

Bass

Intro
9-12

Jazz
waltz:
I
35-42

II
70-78

III
105-115

Bass

Intro
13-19

Jazz
waltz:
I
43-54

II
79-90

III
116-127

Bass

The first section is centered over a sonority that has the flavor of F-sharp minor. The bass is a pedal F-sharp throughout most of the section. In the introduction (mm. 1-5) the melody dwells on F-sharp and C-sharp and their upper neighbors. These pitches are also prominent in all of the other analogous sections, except in the first statement of the progression in the jazz waltz. In jazz waltz I the melody consists of a mostly stepwise descent. The melody does not relate to the analogous sections in other variations so much as it does to the following section within the same variation--basically the same melody transposed to E minor. The descent in the first section of jazz waltz I is mirrored in jazz waltz III, which begins with an ascent. The pitch D-sharp, often in conjunction with F-sharp, is prominent near the end of the first section in all four variations.

The second section of the variations is articulated by the move to an E minor chord, as well as a shift to a lower register in the bass. The bass begins on E, but immediately ascends using mostly chromatic motion, coming to rest on B. The melody in all four variations contains a mostly stepwise descent to G-natural. In jazz waltz II the melody consists mostly of leaps at the beginning, but does end with a stepwise descent to G. In all four cases the G in the melody is a member of a C major triad over a B in the bass. This sonority resolves to a B minor chord

at the beginning of the next section. This type of resolution--from a major harmony a half step above the root to the root chord--is a common, almost cliché, device in Latin music.

The third section is almost entirely within the realm of B minor. That is not to say that B minor is tonicized: the music is on B minor without necessarily being in B minor. Again, the melody in all four variations uses B and F-sharp (1 and 5 relative to B minor) and the upper neighbor of F-sharp. The melody of jazz waltz III begins with a stepwise ascent and ends with stepwise descent, the emphasis on B and F-sharp coming in between.

In addition to the prominence of B and F-sharp, there are more pointed similarities in section 3 of the first three variations (introduction and jazz waltz I and II). The melody often begins a stepwise ascent from F-sharp, rising through F-sharp, G, A, and B. This alternates with a "deceptive" rise through F-sharp, G, and A, followed by a leap down to E. These features of the melody, combined with the frequent use of triplet figures continues the Latin flavor established at the beginning of the section.

In all four variations the section ends with a tritone leap to F-natural in the bass. The harmony at this point could be considered as an F major 7th chord with a raised 9th and 11th. However, it is probably more helpful to think of the sonority as a polychord, with an F

major triad in the left hand, and an E major triad in the right hand. This polychord forms a double link with the A minor sonority at the beginning of the next section: the E major chord relates to A minor as a dominant, while the F major chord has a common tone connection.

The fourth and final section begins with a strong arrival on A minor. Immediately thereafter the bass begins a descent, moving by step and chromatically. The melody of the fourth section is quite consistent from one variation to the next. In each case the melody begins with a descent through B A G-natural, followed by octave displacement up to G-natural an octave higher. In the introduction the melodic motion rises chromatically from G-natural to A-sharp. In all of the other variations (jazz waltz I, II, and III) the octave leap from G to G is followed by a long stepwise descent of over an octave. The descending passages, which contain octave displacements within them, end on members of the final sonority of the progression. This final sonority is best viewed as a polychord containing a C major chord in the upper voices and an E augmented chord in the lower voices.

The melodic outline shows many connections, both between analogous sections of different variations, and throughout the entire piece. Virtually the entire melody is based on either stepwise motion (descending or ascending) or the use of $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$ (relative to the local

harmony) and their upper neighbors. There are also parallels in harmony and voicing. Each section begins with at least the strong implication of a minor chord. At the beginning of the first, second, and fourth sections (not the B minor section) a major 9th above the bass is prominent in the melody. In the case of B minor the 9th is minor rather than major, and affects the harmony rather than the melody. Each time B is reached in the bass, there is a C major chord in the right hand (mm. 8, 31-34, 67-69, 103-104).

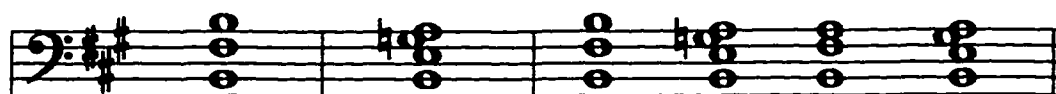
There are also parallels between the first and third sections (beginning with F-sharp minor and B minor), and the second and fourth sections (beginning with E minor and A minor) in all four variations. The first and third sections are both static harmonically, with a pedal point in the bass throughout. In both cases the melody dwells on the local $\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$ and their upper neighbors. In both cases the next section begins with a bass note a second below. In the second and fourth sections the bass begins to move immediately after the initial note. After E is reached the bass begins an immediate ascent; after A is reached the bass begins an immediate descent. The melody in both sections is based on stepwise descent.

The sections beginning on F-sharp minor and B minor not only use pedal points, but use similar chords over the pedal as well. The following example shows the harmonies

in the F-sharp minor section at the beginning of the piece (mm. 1-4):



Compare with the harmonies in the B minor section at mm. 9-11:



In both cases the harmonies alternate between i and iv over a tonic pedal. In the third section this progression contributes to the Latin feel, as it is very similar to the progression from C major to B minor over a B pedal.

The parallels between sections 1 and 3, and 2 and 4 lead to an interpretation of the basic chord progression as an A-B A'-B' structure. Each variation is divided into a two-part form with two very similar halves.

The chart of the melodic activity describes the basic outline of the melody, showing the similarity of the melody in analogous sections. The different ways in which a similar melodic outline is filled in is one of the more vital features of *Song of the Wind*. The melody in section 2 of the variations (the section beginning on an E minor

harmony) offers a good example of the techniques Corea uses to do this.

mm. 7-8:



mm. 27-31:



mm. 63-67:



mm. 99-103:



Melodic descent by second is sometimes cast in a more defined setting. In the following example, the descent is cast in a particular motive (mm. 119-124):



Even the most basic version of the stepwise descent has a particular rhythmic motive, seen here at mm. 20-23:



One effect of this rhythm is that the descent is broken into overlapping segments of a 3rd. The descending 3rd segment appears in isolation at the arrival on A minor at mm. 43-44:



This same basic figure occurs at every A minor arrival in the jazz waltz section: mm. 13-14, 43-44, 79-80, and 115-116. The stepwise descent through a 3rd also is also manifested in other motives. In one of the most common, the descending notes are in triplet rhythm and are repeated several times. The first notable appearance of this motive is at mm. 33-34:



This motive, which evokes the trumpet and the Latin style, also occurs in a very recognizable form at m. 109 and in

the coda at mm. 130-131. It affects the melody at mm. 56-60 and appears in inversion at mm. 88-90:

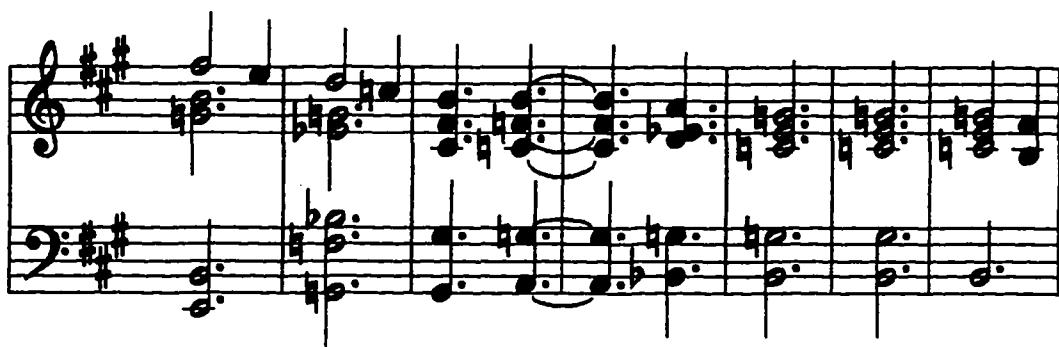


It appears in a more varied form at mm. 104-108:



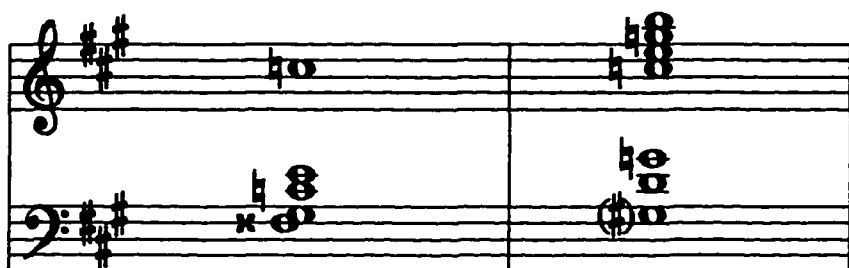
As seen in these examples, the melodic activity throughout the piece is based on a combination of economy and inventiveness.

The harmony is closely related to the voice leading. Traditional functional harmony plays a relatively minor role, generally affecting the music only at the local level, if at all. The most illuminating approach is to see the harmonies as filling in the framework created by the outer voices. This can be seen clearly in a harmonic reduction of mm. 27-34:



In mm. 27-28 the chord in the right hand moves down a 3rd, paralleling the melody, while the chord in the left hand moves up a 3rd, paralleling the bass. The same sort of motion is applied to quartal chords in m. 29. The upper four notes--all perfect fourths--move down a half-step, while the bass moves up a half-step.

Although the coda is the only section of the piece that is not based on the standard chord progression, there are similarities between the coda and the rest of the piece. There are several strong arrivals on recognizable harmonies--E major at m. 129, C-sharp minor at m. 134, and G-sharp minor at m. 136--but no context establishing a clear functional role. The most important element shared by the coda and the rest of the piece is that the coda ends with the same E augmented/C major sonority as the standard chord progression. In the coda the bichordal nature of the sonority is very pronounced: the right hand uses an almost cliché ending in C major, while the left hand clearly leans toward E major. This leaves the tonic in question, even as the piece ends. At mm. 53-54 there is a variation of this chord that gives clues as to its possible role, as seen in the reduction below:



The addition of D gives a dominant 7th quality to the chord. Furthermore, the lack of a root, as well as the voicing of the three notes in the left hand in m. 54 (third, seventh, sharp ninth) are common jazz versions of dominant harmonies. The possibility of a dominant role for the E chord leads to the question of its resolution. The E based harmony moves not to an A harmony, but rather to F-sharp minor. If E is interpreted as V, then F-sharp minor would be interpreted as vi. This would form a deceptive resolution from the end of each variation to the beginning of the next. Though this is the only occasion at which the D is added, the quasi-dominant role of the E sonority is viable throughout the piece.

At the end of the piece, there is nothing following the final sonority to which it could resolve, implying a conclusion on a half cadence. This suggests the key of A as tonic. That this corresponds with the key signature of A major cannot be given too much credence since this was not originally written music. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that most of *Song of the Wind* is not far removed from the sphere of A major. All of the main harmonies emphasized or tonicized are related to A major in some way: F-sharp minor is the relative minor, B minor is the diatonic ii chord, A minor and E minor are the parallel tonic and dominant respectively. Though the key of A major is never actually reached, the different

sections of *Song of the Wind* seem to be expressions of A major with the tonic suppressed. Though it impossible to make a final determination as to the question of A major as tonic, it is the most viable explanation of the tonal ambiguity throughout the piece and the unusual ending. It is also worth noting that a half cadence at the end of *Song of the Wind* would lead directly to A minor, the key of the next piece. This is in keeping with other cyclic elements of the *Piano Improvisations*, which will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

The overall effect of *Song of the Wind* is intriguing. The title suggests something fleeting and difficult to grasp, which is reflected in the music. Without analysis or very careful listening it is easy to miss the fact that most of the piece consists of variations over the same harmonic progression. This was apparently Corea's intent, as the boundaries between variations are artfully disguised. This pushes the form to the background or subconscious level. Other elements of the piece are more readily apprehended by the listener: consistently recognizable harmonies at key locations and a melody that uses economical material in a variety of ways.

CHAPTER 7

SOMETIME AGO

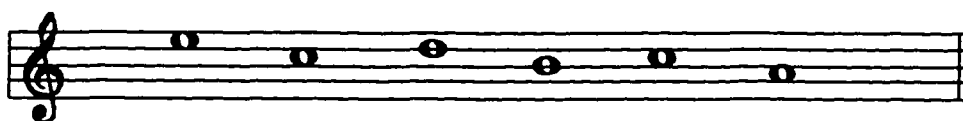
Sometime Ago is a long work in A minor using traditional harmonic language and Latin rhythms throughout much of the piece. There is very little of the piece that is not affected by the Latin style, whether bossa nova or more traditional (or even cliché) Spanish music. Some Latin elements, such as the use of parallel triads and trumpet-like fanfares that evoke the bullring, approach the point of parody. But Corea maintains a serious, indeed almost somber tone throughout most of the piece. The piece is notated without a time signature, but there are regular beats and, in much of the piece, a definite 4/4 meter. Even when in the areas of 4/4, the rhythmic feel is generally relaxed rather than goal-oriented. This, combined with the slow harmonic rhythm and overall length, create a nostalgic feel in keeping with the title.

The form comprises many small sections articulated in three main parts: a slow introduction, a long series of variations in Latin rhythm, and a coda. There are significant transitional areas leading into and out of the middle section of the piece. The dimensions of the main sections of the piece are roughly symmetrical:

Intro	Trans.	Variations	Trans.	Coda
1-67	68-103	104-268	269-287	287-323
67	36	165	18	37

Dynamics, texture, and rhythm all play a role in defining the form.

The melodic material is equally important in articulating the form. There is an underlying "motive" which does not appear itself, but serves as the source of virtually all melodic and motivic activity in the piece. This material, which will be referred to as the motivic background (not in the strict Schenkerian sense, though the idea is similar), consists of descending thirds, linked together in a descending sequence:



This is too abstract to be considered a motive as such. It is, rather, the raw material from which motives and melodies are constructed.

One of the most widely used motives in the piece appears in the first measure. The melody is derived from a version of the motivic background with the first note omitted. In the following example the omitted first note is shown in parentheses. The three notes under the bracket represent the motive, designated x (m. 1):



The x motive appears throughout the piece, sometimes in varied form.

There is another motive, derived from the motivic background, which is commonly used and perhaps more recognizable than the x motive. This motive, designated y, makes its first unequivocal appearance in mm. 24-25:



The x and y motives are present throughout the piece, and their treatment shapes the form. The introduction begins by using the x motive in an inconsistent and rather free-form way, gradually introducing the y motive. The variations use both motives in a much more structured way. In the coda, the y motive gradually disappears, followed by more free-form use of the x motive and motivic background. This forms a symmetrical structure or mirror image, moving from less formal music to a more structured approach and back again.

Within the introduction there are two distinct components. The piece begins with a loud, fanfare-like melody moving in relatively short note values. The texture is unison, two octaves apart. These areas, which make use of the x motive, are followed by quieter, slow-moving, chordal music of a more contemplative nature. It is during these interludes that the y motive gradually

evolves. Throughout the introduction the music alternates between these two elements. The exact measures involved are shown below. The faster unison sections are designated A, while the sustained chordal sections are designated B.

A1	B1	A2	B2	A3	B3	A4	B4	A5	B5
1-2	3-6	7-11	11-15	16-21	22-32	33-38	39-55	56-58	58-67
2	4	5	5	6	11	6	17	3	10

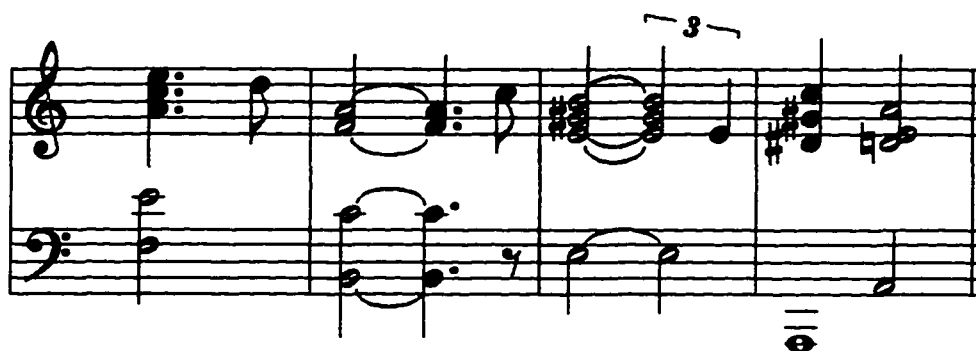
All of the A sections in the introduction begin with motion from $\hat{5}$ up to $\hat{1}$. The rhythm is usually relatively fast notes, often with the feel of upbeat to downbeat, as seen at the beginning of the piece (m. 1):



The leap of a fourth, usually played loudly and in unison octaves, is largely responsible for the trumpet/fanfare feel of the A sections. It is used with enough consistency that it gains a certain amount of motivic status in the A sections. It is present at mm. 0-1, 1-2, 6-7, 10-11, 15, 33, and 55.

The x motive is present in its original form in A1 and A2. In A3 it also appears in transposition in mm. 15-17. The use of the x motive, along with consistency of texture and dynamics, is one of the main unifying factors in the A sections.

The B sections or interludes are also unified by several means. The first three B sections (mm. 3-6, 11-15, and 22-32) all use the same chord progression. Though there are differences in inflection and inversion, the harmonic progression in all three is similar to the example below, from mm. 11-14:



The phrase ends with a descending leap of a third from C to A-- $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$ in A minor. This descent also appears in a similar closing position in most of the B sections (mm. 4-5, 14, 23, 64). Melodic descent from C to A is used as a punctuation at the end of phrases throughout the piece.

The y motive is derived in part from a rhythmic figure that first appears in B1 at mm. 3-4:



This rhythm is combined with the descending 3rd of the motivic background in B3 at m. 23:



This leads immediately to the first fully formed y motive in the following measure. The motive is set in parallel triads, which turns out to be a common setting of the y motive throughout the piece (mm. 24-25):



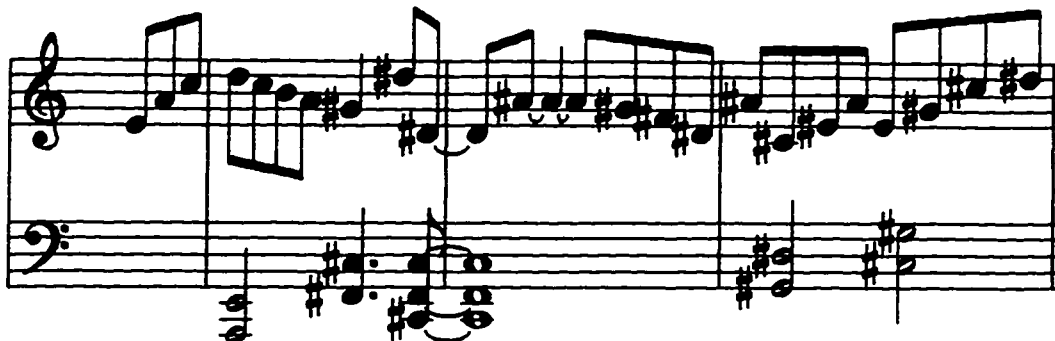
The B4 section explores other possibilities of the y motive, directly based on the motivic background (mm. 38-40):



The setting of the y motive in triplets and parallel triads contributes to the Latin style which is pervasive in *Sometime Ago*.

The transition (mm. 68-103) into the middle section of the piece begins with broken chords descending by second, arriving at A minor at m. 74. The Latin rhythm begins at this point, but there is really no melodic or harmonic activity (other than a tonic pedal) until measure

77. At this point both the melody and harmony wander in what sounds like an almost random succession (mm.77-80):



The left hand moves in open fifths mostly in half notes, while the right hand moves in continuous eighth notes. The pitches in the right hand tend towards the F-sharp major scale, and though the left hand contains a fifth on F-sharp at measure 78, there is no clear tonicization.

At m. 81 the music returns to A minor, leading to a tonic cadence measure 86. The arrival on A minor is punctuated once again by the descent from C to A in the melody.

At measure 86 the process followed in the transition up to now is repeated: there is Latin rhythm over a tonic pedal from measure 86-91, the wandering passage from measure 92-101, and a cadence into A minor from measure 102-104.

At this point the Latin rhythm returns, now with a slower tempo, marking the beginning of the middle section of the piece. This section is a series of variations, all

using stepwise descent from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$. The section is divided into seven parts or variations:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
104-123	124-145	146-188	189-204	205-232	233-248	249-268

The variations have many common elements between them. Though there are important differences, the prototypical variation has at least three basic components or subsections.

In the first subsection, designated a, the left hand maintains a Latin rhythm with a tonic pedal in the bass, while the right hand melody descends from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$. This descent typically occurs in four two-measure phrases, using a variant of the x motive (mm. 146-153):



In this and other analogous passages every note except for the E at the beginning occurs in tandem with the note a 3rd above. This creates a two-voice descent in the

melody, accompanied by alternating chords in the left hand, as seen in the reduction of mm. 146-153:



When members of the tonic triad are prominent in the melody the harmonies feature a fifth above the bass. When neighbor tones ($\hat{6}$, $\hat{4}$, or $\hat{2}$) are prominent, there is a 6th above the bass. This descent as described above usually occurs twice before the next subsection is reached.

In the next subsection, designated b, the accompaniment halts as the texture changes to a single line melody. The melody consists purely of the y motive, and occurs in parallel octaves or chords. As in the preceding subsection, the melodic motion is a stepwise descent from $\hat{5}$, or sometimes $\hat{6}$. In the following example

the melody is in parallel thirds, two octaves apart (mm. 136-138):



After the descent using the y motive there is a cadential area, designated subsection c, sometimes longer than that in mm. 139-140. The accompaniment generally comes to a halt, followed by a V-i cadence in A minor. As in previous sections, the cadence is often punctuated by $\hat{3}$ to $\hat{1}$ in the melody (mm. 118, 140, and 265). When A minor is reached, the Latin rhythm resumes.

The above description outlines the general features found in most variations. Some the individual variations have important differences, which are outlined below.

Variation 1 (mm. 104-123) establishes the texture, accompaniment, and the rhythmic nature of the melody for subsection a. It does not, however, actually contain the melodic descent. Subsections b (mm. 114-116) and c (117-123) are present.

Variation 2 (mm. 124-145) is the first of the variations to incorporate the inverted x motive and the

descent. The descent in the first phrase (mm. 124-129) is somewhat truncated, descending from $\hat{3}$, rather than from $\hat{5}$. In the second phrase (mm. 132-135) the descent does begin on $\hat{5}$. Subsections b (136-138) and c (mm. 139-145) are standard.

Variation 3 (mm. 146-188) contains all of the standard components: the descent, the y motive, and the tonic cadence. It also has several elements that are not part of the typical variation. As the initial descent (subsection a) ends, the music takes a new direction at m. 162, but returns to a strong tonic arrival at m. 166. This is followed by a four-measure passage of block chords descending by second (mm. 168-171), which is similar to mm. 82-85. The rest of the variation is more or less standard. There is a slight variation at mm. 177-179 where the y motive is played in fourths rather than the usual third derivatives or octaves.

Variation 4 (mm. 189-204), along with number 6 which is more or less identical, represent the greatest departure from the standard variation format. The most important difference is the shift of mode to A major. The

overall motion is still descent by second from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$ (mm. 189-195):



As in the other variations, the descent occurs in parallel thirds. It differs from the descents in the minor key in that the third above $\hat{5}$ ($\hat{7}$) is present. The descent occurs twice, at which point the variation ends: subsections b and c are absent. This variation, with the melody set in parallel sixths and thirds, is close to the style of sentimental pop music. It is redeemed somewhat by the flexible treatment of the rhythm. This section also seems to be intentionally *dolce* to offer a contrast with the unrelenting somberness of A minor.

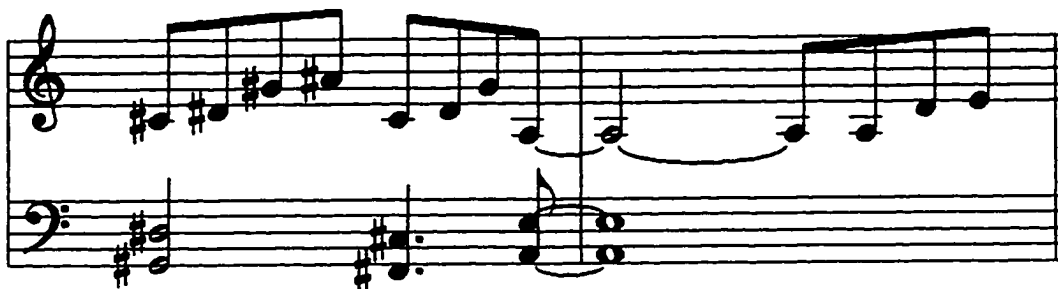
Variation 5 (mm. 205-232) begins with a strong juxtaposition of major and minor at m. 205 where A minor returns abruptly. This variation follows the standard format, along with additions very similar to variation 4. The variant of the x motive is still used during the descent, but now the melody is varied, using a more emphatic rhythm (mm. 205-212). In the second statement of

the descent the motion stalls on B or $\hat{2}$ at m. 219. This is followed by a buildup to a strong tonic arrival at m. 223, very similar to mm. 163-166 in variation 3. The tonic arrival is followed immediately by subsections b (mm. 224-227) and c (mm. 227-232).

Variation 6 (mm. 233-248) is a repeat of variation 4, the A major variation, with no appreciable difference.

Variation 7 (mm. 249-268) follows the basic format of the standard variations, but with significant differences. Subsection a begins in the standard way and then gives way to a more rapid descent using the y motive (253-257). The hastening rhythm in the right hand combined with the breakdown of the Latin rhythm in the left hand contributes to the feeling that the variations are coming to a close. Subsections b (260-264) and c (265-268) follow.

The transition to the coda (mm. 269-287) is similar in texture to the first transitional section: the left hand consists of open fifths, basically in half note rhythm; the right hand plays nearly continuous eighth notes. Beginning at m. 271, the pattern below repeats six times, with the bass remaining the same and slight variations in the right hand (mm. 271-272):



In contrast to the transition into the variations, the transition to the coda strongly affirms the tonic. The left hand uses the inverted x motive in parallel fifths as a cadential formula, emphasizing the tonic.

The simplicity of the pattern and amount of repetition give the music a sense of being stuck in the pattern. The escape is finally accomplished at m. 283 where the harmony changes to an unusual chord based on F while the melody dwells on the y motive (mm. 283-284):



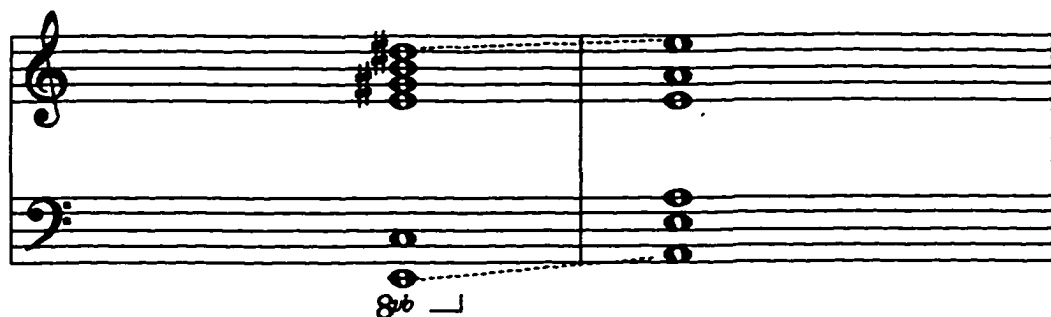
The exact same sonority appears prominently in *Song of the Wind*, where its function is ambiguous. In *Sometime Ago* it functions as the VI chord (despite its alterations), which then descends the dominant at m. 285. This leads to a strong tonic arrival at m. 287 in a manner very similar to the passages at mm. 171-174 and 219-223. With the tonic arrival the coda begins.

The coda (mm. 287-323) is divided into two parts. The first part dwells on the y motive, until it finally loses supporting tonic or even functional harmony and "dissolves." This process begins at m. 288 where the y

motive is set in triplet rhythm against a left hand accompaniment that creates a hemiola effect (mm. 288-292). This weakens the continuity of the rhythm until the accompaniment drops out altogether at m. 293. As the accompaniment subsides, between m. 288 and m. 297, the melody gains a fuller texture: it is set in single notes, parallel thirds, and finally parallel first-inversion triads. The music comes to a halt on a half cadence at m. 297. After this, the melody continues to dwell on the y motive, now supported by augmented chords with major sevenths moving in parallel motion. The melody is altered to comply with the harmonies, giving it somewhat of a whole tone flavor.

The second section of the coda begins with an arrival on A minor at m. 308. From this point to the end of the piece the rhythm returns to the *senza misura* feel, similar to the introduction. There is no consistent use of motivic material or the motivic background, though there are occasional traces of the x motive. There is a long prolongation of D-sharp in the melody beginning at m. 313. The D-sharp is supported by a variety of sonorities, culminating on an E augmented chord with a major seventh at m. 318. This sonority functions as a dominant, with D-

sharp serving as a double leading tone, as seen in the harmonic reduction of mm. 318-319:



The use of a major seventh in the dominant is logical, as the tonic chord which follows contains no third--the note to which the lowered seventh of the dominant typically resolves.

The tonic arrival at m. 319, is followed by a last echo of the descent from $\hat{5}$ using the inverted x motive (m. 320):



The final tonic is reached at m. 322. The harmony arpeggiated through the last two measures has no third, containing a root, fifth, second (or ninth), and fourth. The F-natural at the end of m. 322, as well as the C-naturals in preceding measures, affirm A minor as the tonic.

Much of *Sometime Ago* is very similar to *Song for Sally* in terms of style. Indeed there are parts of

Sometime Ago that could easily be mistaken for *Song for Sally*. The main reason for this is the Latin rhythm and similar texture used in both works. There are also similarities in the melodic material, in that both pieces involve stepwise descent from $\hat{5}$ or E. Like *Song for Sally*, a version of *Sometime Ago* was adapted as a more popular version for ensemble, complete with lyrics.¹

In terms of process *Sometime Ago* is more closely related to *Ballad for Anna*. Both pieces are driven by the manifestations of the main melodic material. Though the end products are quite different, both pieces are striking examples of the variety that can be achieved with very economical means.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the Chick Corea *Piano Improvisations* leads to the consideration of several other issues. One of the most pressing of these is the question of whether analytical methods usually associated with composed classical music are useful in the examination of improvisations employing the jazz style. This, in turn, raises more fundamental questions as to the differences between improvisation and composition, and between jazz and classical music.

The methods used in this study--traditional harmonic, formal, and motivic analysis combined with melodic and harmonic reduction--do indeed prove to be valuable means of examining the music. As to the question of boundaries between improvisation and composition; jazz and classical music however, inquiry into the *Piano Improvisations* serves only call the validity of making such distinctions at all into question. On the subject of placing music into jazz or classical categories, Corea has the following comments:

One can get into a great deal of controversy trying to label things. As a matter of fact, one of the artist's functions is to create, and not to be worried with what already established mold one may fit into. . . . in that sense, there should not even be a question. If there is, then that raises the point of the purpose of the question. Is it so that we will know where to place this music in the curriculum? Or is it

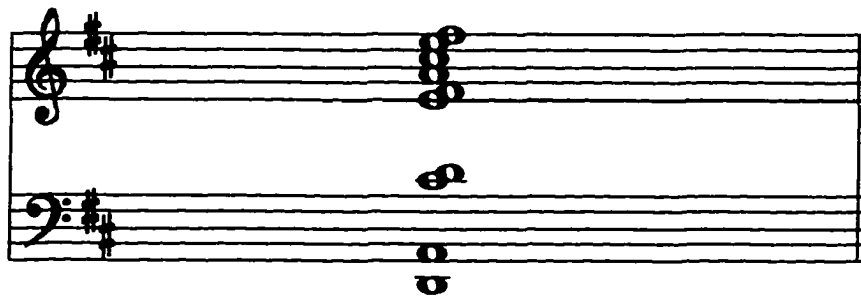
so that we may know how to review it, in what section of the magazine, the classical or the jazz section? Or is it so that we will know what record label it should be sold under?¹

Steven Larson makes a similar point regarding the supposed differences between composed and improvised music. In answering the question of whether it is possible to apply analytic methods developed for the study of composed music (Schenkerian analysis) to improvisation, Larson writes, "This question suggests misconceptions about the content and origin of Schenker theories. . . . Compositions he [Schenker] analyzed may be considered records of successful improvisations."² Larson goes on to demonstrate that many of the relationships found in composed music are also possible in improvisation.

The nature of Chick Corea's *Piano Improvisations* demonstrates that the jazz and classical styles have much in common and can be blended to the point that the resulting music cannot be placed into either category. The present study also adds to evidence given in Larson's dissertation, that improvisation and composition are closely related, and that many qualities associated with composition can be produced in improvised music.

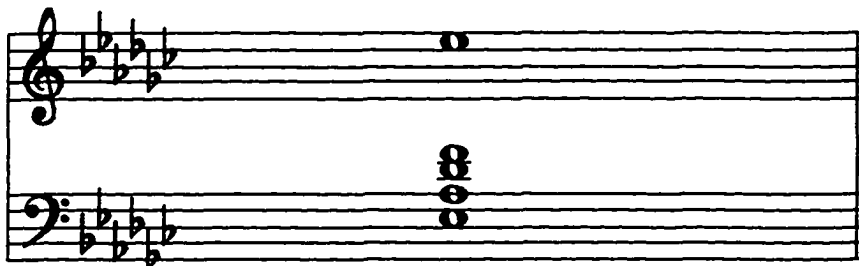
The harmonic language in the *Piano Improvisations* is a combination of common practice harmony, jazz harmony, and more modern effects such as quartal/quintal sonorities and polychords. Traditional dominant-tonic relationships are common, but the chords are often altered, in a sense

creating a highly contextualized treatment of consonance and dissonance. The clearest manifestation of this is the addition of extended notes, such as sevenths and ninths, even to the final tonic harmonies. Consider, for example, the final harmony of *Noon Song*, which reduces to the following (m. 75):



The presence of a major seventh (C-sharp) and ninth (E) in no way diminishes the stability and finality of this sonority. This is due to the context that has been established throughout the piece: chords, tonic or otherwise, featuring only the root, third, and fifth of the triad are exceedingly rare.

In *Ballad for Anna*, a piece with a strong tonic of E-flat minor, the most common voicing of the tonic chord is as follows (e.g. m. 1):



Though this sonority is essentially a polychord (D-flat major triad over E-flat), the piece establishes a context whereby it serves as the tonic harmony.

The nonfunctional harmonies that do occur are often circumscribed by traditional functionality. Consider the following passage from *Noon Song* (m. 22):



The series of quartal harmonies serve to prolong a functional harmony, in this case a rootless F-sharp dominant harmony, serving a clear role as V/vi. The quartal harmonies are a logical choice for moving between two versions of the F-sharp sonority that are themselves voiced mainly in fourths.

Harmonic motion in the *Piano Improvisations*, and indeed in much of jazz, often uses the same basic progressions driven by the same sort of voice leading as in common practice classical music. It is in the voicing of the individual chords, specifically in the notes added or omitted, that the main differences are found. In terms of harmony and tonality jazz and classical styles particularly as embodied in the *Piano Improvisations*, do not represent different languages so much as two dialects of the same language.

One of Corea's most impressive accomplishments in the *Piano Improvisations* is the improvised creation of convincing forms. The common process from which the forms are generated is the use of variation technique. All of the pieces use variation in some way, based on either harmonic or motivic material. This provides for a combination of variety and stability. In his article on improvisation in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, Barry Kernfeld writes:

The essence of improvisation in jazz is the delicate balance between spontaneous invention, carrying with it both the danger of loss of control and the opportunity for creativity of a high order, and reference to the familiar, without which, paradoxically, creativity cannot be truly valued.³

This balance of invention and reference to the familiar is a central feature of the *Piano Improvisations*.

This is especially evident in the treatment of melodic and motivic materials. Most of the pieces have one or two motives from which a wide variety of melodic material is derived. This is an important factor in lending coherence to a potentially unwieldy genre. As Barry Kernfeld observes, "The fertility of invention of the greatest improvisers may be gauged by the variety of possibilities they find in a single theme."⁴

In addition to motivic unity within the individual pieces, there are connections between the *Piano Improvisations* as a group. All of the main motives

involve stepwise descent through a third. Compare the main motives from each of the pieces:

Noon Song, (x2)



Song for Sally



Ballad for Anna (a common version)



Song of the Wind (one of the most recognizable melodies)



Sometime Ago (y motive)



In the case of *Ballad for Anna* and *Sometime Ago* the motives not only have the same intervallic content, but similar contour and rhythm as well. In addition to the main motives, much of the less structured melodic material throughout the *Piano Improvisations* also uses descent by step.

The motivic material often has an effect on other aspects of the music as well. In *Noon Song*, for example, the different versions of the main motive help to define the form. In *Ballad for Anna* the harmonies often move by third, the interval spanned by the main motive. The melodic motion by second in *Song of the Wind* is reflected in the predominant bass notes of the major sections.

The high degree of motivic unity in the *Piano Improvisations* is difficult to explain without a truer understanding of the nature of improvisation. In *Thinking in Jazz*, an in-depth investigation into jazz improvisation using an ethnomusicological approach, Paul Berliner writes:

The popular definitions of improvisation that emphasize only its spontaneous, intuitive nature--characterizing it as the 'making of something out of nothing'--are astonishingly incomplete. This simplistic understanding of improvisation belies the discipline and experience on which improvisers depend, and it obscures the actual practices and processes that engage them. Improvisation depends, in fact, on thinkers having absorbed a broad base of musical knowledge, including myriad conventions that

contribute to formulating ideas logically,
cogently and expressively.⁵

Improvisation as understood in this light has produced, in the *Piano Improvisations*, music that embodies blending of styles, a high degree of formal integrity, and, an artful combination of economy and invention.

Heinrich Schenker, yearning for a composer of new music who would carry on the traditions he revered, wrote, "this coming genius will . . . be similar to the great masters of the past, but certainly just as different from them as all of them are different from each other."⁶ Hyperbole aside, the Chick Corea *Piano Improvisations* show that this is possible in ways that Schenker never would have imagined.

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²¹Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²²Idem., 17.

²³Heinrich Schenker, "The Art of Improvisation," in *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, Vol. II trans. Sylvan Kalib (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1973), 5.

²⁴Ibid., 51.

²⁵Stanley Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), s.v. "Improvisation" by Eva Badura-Skoda.

²⁶Emily Anderson, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Mozart and His Family* (London: Macmillan, 1938), Vol. 2, 498.

²⁷Charles Burkhart, "Schenker's 'Motivic Parallelisms'," *Journal of Music Theory* 22/2 (Fall 1978): 161-167.

²⁸Chick Corea, *Piano Improvisations Volume One*, sound recording, LP 1014, ECM, 1971.

²⁹Chick Corea, *Piano Improvisations*, transcribed by Bill Dobbins (Rottenburg am Neckar, Germany: Advance Music, 1990).

³⁰Potter, 159.

Chapter 7

¹Chick Corea, *Return to Forever*, sound recording, LP 1022, ECM, 1972.

Chapter 8

¹Carol Jane Yampolsky, "The Solo Jazz Piano Music of Three American Composers: Armando 'Chick' Corea, William 'Billy' Taylor, Mary Lou Williams" (D.M.A. monog., University of Maryland, 1986), 23.

²Steven Leroy Larson, "Schenkerian Analysis of Modern Jazz" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1987), 13-14.

³Kernfeld, *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, "Improvisation," by Barry Kernfeld.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 492.

⁶Heinrich Schenker, "The Art of Improvisation," in *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik*, Vol. II trans. Sylvan Kalib (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1973), 51.

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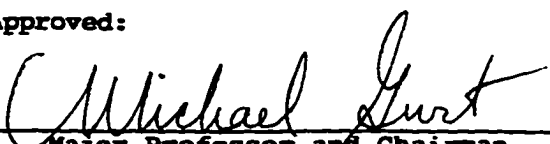
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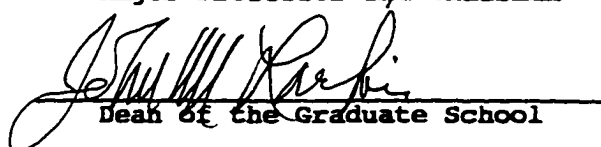
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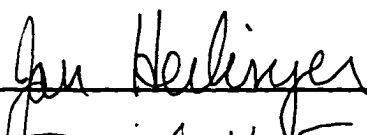
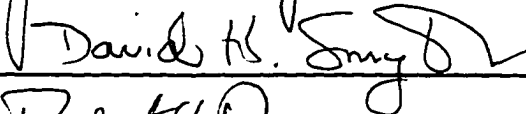
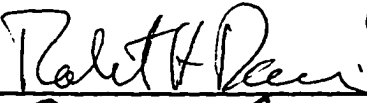
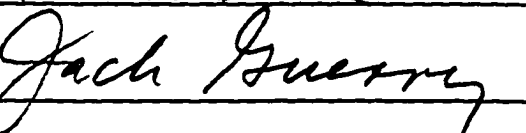
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